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**New M3 scooped!**

The legend returns as two cars, one petrol, one EV

# New Panda

## vs Renault 5 & Mini

REBORN SUPERMINI ICONS  
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# Welcome

## Rivals' failures shed light on the success of the 3-series

Alfa is used to it, but being the underdog is a strange position for Mercedes, Toyota and Audi to find themselves in.

And yet that is exactly what the BMW 3-series has done to those automotive giants, for generations now. Try as they might, their attempts to beat the 3-series at its own game have rarely, and even then only fleetingly, succeeded.

BMW didn't invent the compact-ish saloon, but with the 3-series it turned that potentially nothing-ish idea into an object of desire. Just what is it that makes a 3-series a 3-series? Several *CAR* writers make an attempt in this issue. And several car makers have tried to emulate that elusive combination of quality, simplicity, practicality and driver appeal.

The failure of Alfa, Audi, Mercedes and Lexus is worth dwelling on because it sheds light on what is so good about the 3-series.

Most recently with the Giulia, Alfa has made several attempts. More than any of the other ersatz Threes, the Alfa is a success – not commercially so much as emotionally. You don't look askance at someone who buys a Giulia.

The Mercedes C-Class and Audi A4 have both, over the years, generally fallen short. Where they've sometimes nudged ahead is with the estates, coupes, cabrios, nostril-flaring performance variants and All-road cult oddities. But with the core, normal saloon, no.

Toyota's failed attempt was utterly transparent. Just as the LS was meant to depose the Mercedes S-Class (as analysed by Stephen Bayley in this issue), the Lexus IS was

pure 3-series clone, right down to the not-very-spacious estate version and the F-Sport transplant of M division ideas.

And then there are the Hondas, Rovers, Jaguars and many other attempts to do a 3-series. They may be failures in this specific regard, but they're generally pretty good cars in their own right, indicative of the way the 3-series has raised the bar.

There are some notable absentees from this list. VW has never really gone for the 3-series. The booted Golfs have been that bit smaller and cheaper, and the Passat has tended to chase different priorities. Could VW have made a 3-series if it wanted to? We'll never know.

And then there's the big one: Porsche. We might like to think of it as a maker of sports cars, but that's rarely been the extent of its ambitions; Porsche's excellent SUVs weren't its first attempt at moving beyond that narrow field. The 924 and others showed a willingness to appeal to a less hardcore group of potential buyers, and an appetite for taking dynamic excellence into formats other than just rear-engined coupes.

If, for whatever combination of reasons, the stars had not aligned for the Cayenne, and it had not been so good dynamically and such a big seller, might Porsche have continued experimenting with different formats, and eventually hit upon a compact saloon? Maybe it did try, although nothing along those lines was evident in 2020 when Porsche showed off some of its previously secret concept cars. But who knows what even more secret vault still remains to be unlocked?



**Colin Overland**  
Production editor

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# car

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# 68

**The M3 is about to go  
electric... and stick with  
petrol too**

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NEWS + INDUSTRY + TECH + CULTURE + SPORT

# Agenda



**The idea is to take the spirit of those old record cars and apply it to the challenges of 21st century EV development**

► **Slung low in a seat** that's more hammock than bucket – your feet up high and the car's warm, hard-working battery beneath your knees like a snoozing dog – you're comfortable enough. Cool air streams in from the twin NACA ducts in your Renault's endless bonnet, the only blemishes on its otherwise continuous and pebble-smooth skin. Besides, with a view like this one, you could be in agony and it wouldn't matter.

Your universe has gone binary: blue above the horizon; a dazzling white beneath it. Bar some very distant hills – at this distance nothing more than dirty smudges along the bottom of the sky – there is nothing else out here; nothing to distract you and, crucially, nothing to hit. With no reference points to work with, your car – gliding across the hard-packed salt like a maglev train, near-silent and apparently free of physics – feels like it's moving at a canter. But the numbers on the instruments would suggest not, and there's more to come.

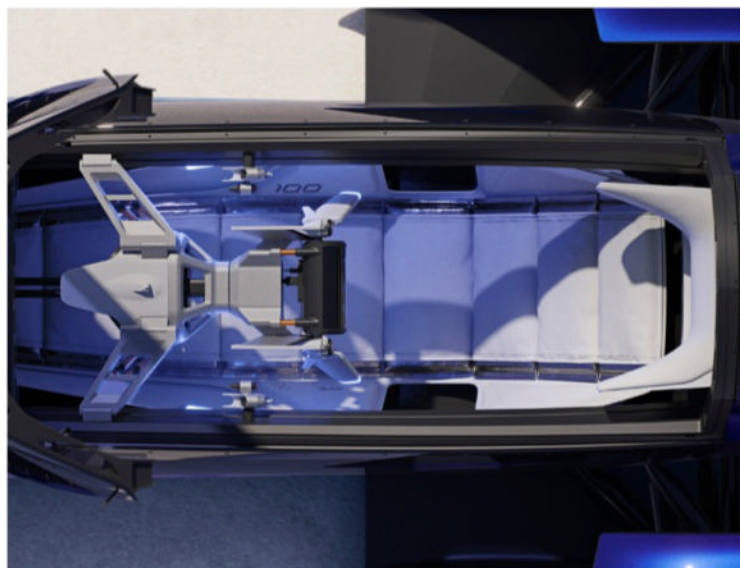
Another twist of the throttle (it's on the steering yoke) and the Filante – French for 'shooting star' – surges faster still, its wake of powdery dust growing longer and longer as your speed soars unchecked, the car slipping through the atmosphere like an Earthbound comet.

Cockpit is strictly a single-seater

FUTURE DOODLING

# Renault's Filante concept is perfectly pointless

Ben Miller Editor



Renault's in a good place, but where does it go from here? Until recently it seemed content to sell the Clio and a range of interchangeable crossovers, but it's now on such a roll that a U-turn on its Alpine F1 branding and a dive back into motorsport's biggest cash incinerator wouldn't come as a surprise. It nailed the brief for the re-born 5, a car that looks set to do for the mainstream supermini what the Model 3 did for the premium compact saloon. Its new-product conveyor belt is groaning with cool stuff, including the 4 (the 5's frumpier but more useful sibling), an impossibly cute new Twingo and the 5 Turbo 3E Electric, a big-money, limited-run flex more commonly seen from the likes of Porsche or BMW. How do you follow all that?

Well, wonder no longer. The answer is obvious: you cut loose with an old-school, no-limits concept car – a five-metre-long streamliner with no pedals, lashings of carbonfibre and so much style that a 'Can we have that for something we're working on?' call from Disney, current custodians of the *Star Wars* universe, feels inevitable. It's called the Filante Record 2025, and no amount of pestering at your local dealer will net you a build slot.

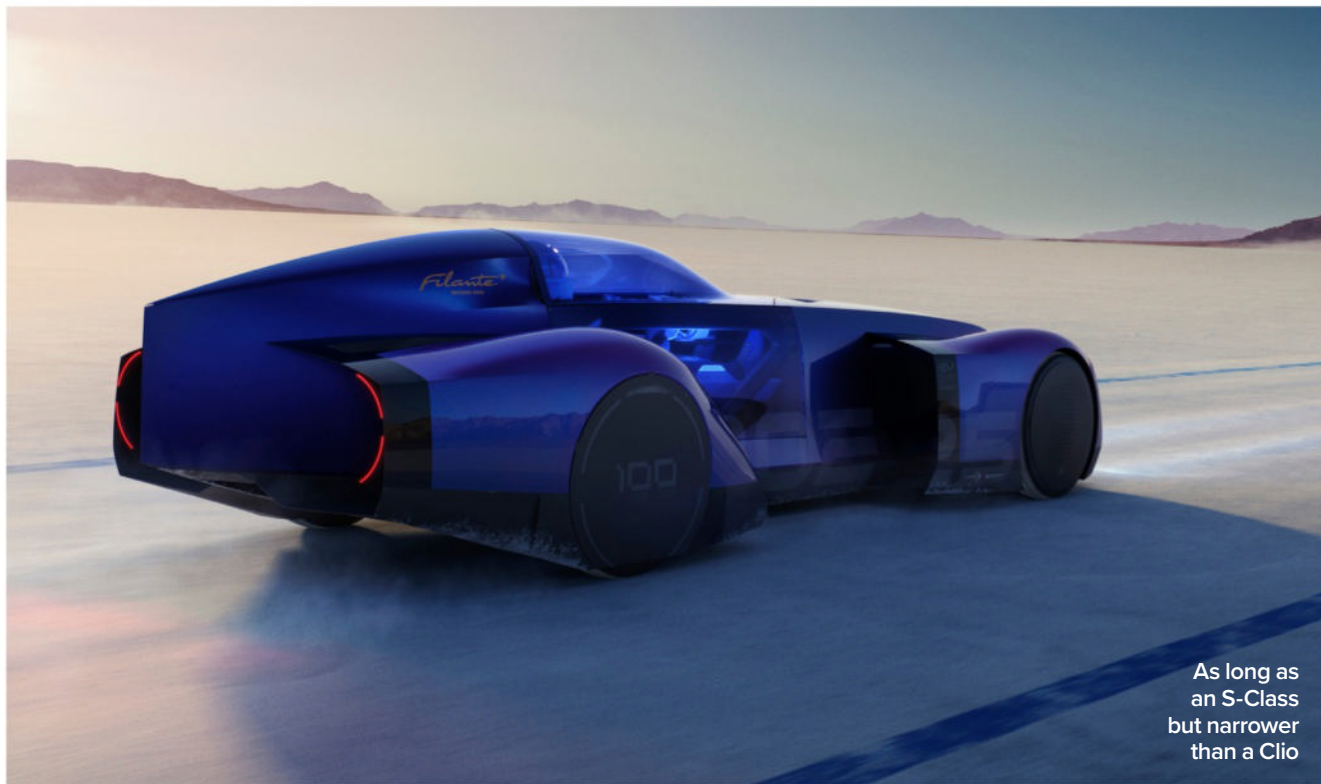
And if it feels like the kind of expressive, confidence-soaked statement concept only a marque feeling good about itself could produce, well, that's because it is. Throughout the company, Renault folks reference another great age – that seam of form in the mid '90s that produced the likes of the original Twingo and genre-busting Scenic (not to mention some unbeatable Formula 1 engines, the Espace F1 and the Clio Williams) – and suggest the feeling is the same now. They acknowledge, too, the importance of the Zoe. A rare example of an EV that was both pioneering *and* successful, Renault's contemporary electric cars owe a great deal to that project's learnings.

Concept cars without production intent have shuffled out of favour, replaced by thinly veiled taste testers that plough on into production regardless of the reception. But the Filante Record 2025's grip in reality is refreshingly scant. It is Renault design doing what Renault design has a rich history of doing; doodling greatness. It's gleefully cooked up a 1000kg EV drawing energy from a 600kg battery pack loosely based on the Scenic's 87kWh unit (the cells have been reshuffled to create a more appropriate shape, and the casing wrought from carbonfibre).

Why? To give itself a suitably dramatic set of dimensions with which to express itself, to showcase a bunch of new ideas currently bouncing around Renault's R&D labs, including by-wire control, and to highlight Renault's rich history of developing new technologies in competition; it turned out a number of endurance and speed record cars back in the day, including the 40 CV des Records of the '20s (the Filante's most obvious direct inspiration), the Nervasport des Records and the Etoile Filante.

The idea is to take the spirit of those record cars – sleek aerodynamics and no-limits innovation – and apply it to the challenges of 21st century EV development, namely getting electric cars to weigh less and go further. ►





As long as  
an S-Class  
but narrower  
than a Clio

The Filante 2025 hasn't delivered answers overnight, as director of advanced design Sandeep Bhambra admits. But then, that's not how these things work. 'When will we have a 1000kg production EV? Great question. Given the effort we had to put in to bring this car in at 1000kg, I think it's going to be some time before we get there. But we're working on it.'

The Filante also explores a futuristic cockpit concept without direct links between the controls and the car's steering, brakes and powertrain; without pedals, even. By-wire braking and steering are nothing new; Ferrari's a big fan of the former in particular, for the control it gives the ECU – particularly handy when you're blending hydraulic braking with energy recuperation in hybrids.

This kind of concept work is an indicator that the technology is being taken seriously across the board, primarily for reasons of packaging efficiency. 'Very interesting for us are these ideas of steer-by-wire and drive-by-

Where we're  
going we  
don't need  
lights

wire, with the brakes and accelerator controlled from the yoke,' explains Stéphane Maiore, Renault design's head of interiors. 'They liberate a lot of space in the interior, and we are looking at exploring these ideas in future.'

That cockpit, given the need to squeeze the frontal area for all it's worth, is predictably tiny. 'The car is very long because to make a car very efficient in terms of aerodynamics you have to go very long,' continues Bhambra. 'We have played with the silhouette a little, to make it look a little like a 40 CV, but the cockpit is really tiny. And you sit in there like you're in an F1 car, with the battery pack underneath your legs.'

'Inside it looks like an aircraft or a space ship, and the first thing to talk about is how you enter the car,' explains Maiore. 'We decided to take the upper window and to open it like this, so the cockpit is also moving with the canopy, for easy access. Yes, it looks a little like a racing car. But we were inspired by jets. They also use lightweight materials, and the seat is a good example of this. It's a simple form, like a hammock, but comfortable and lightweight, with canvas and carbonfibre elements.'

What next for the Filante? Renault plans to hone the form, perhaps reality-checking some of its more outlandish design features to maximise those all-important aerodynamics.

'Right now, we have a range in terms of coefficient of drag, because that's what happens when you test a car in a numeric wind tunnel, in CFD – you don't get an absolute value, because have nothing to compare it with,' says Bhambra. 'If we were testing a new Megane with another Megane, we can test the difference. But this is such an exceptional shape that we don't have any data to compare it with. So we just have a range right now – a range between 0.2 and 0.25. But the real value will come when we begin wind-tunnel testing in the next few months.'

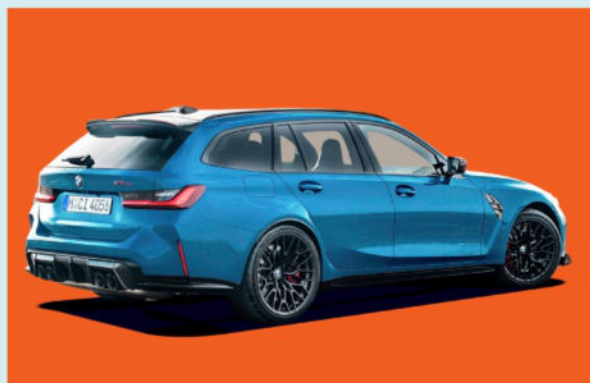
And after that? See you on the salt.



NEW CARS

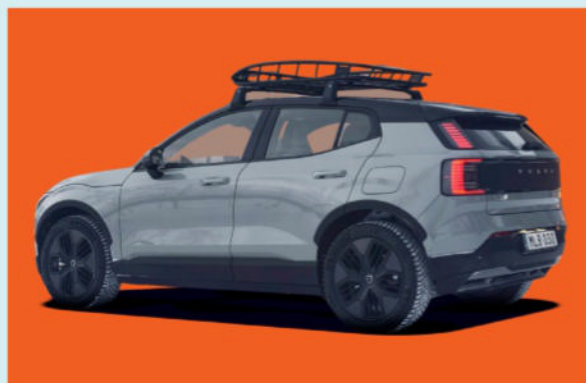
# Un-boring family cars

Jake Groves Deputy news editor



## The tyre destroyer

► **Imagine trackdays in this.** Loaded up with skis, suitcases, children, dogs... and powersliding around the hairpin at the Hockenheimring. Okay, fine, that's probably not going to happen without fear of injury or vomit in the back seats, but an estate that will happily rate your drifts out of five is a rarity indeed. Like the saloon version, the M3 CS Touring has a smidge more power and, more importantly, various weight-saving measures and sharpened dynamics. Given the intel in our cover story, this may be your last chance to get a combustion M3 Touring – get your order in now.



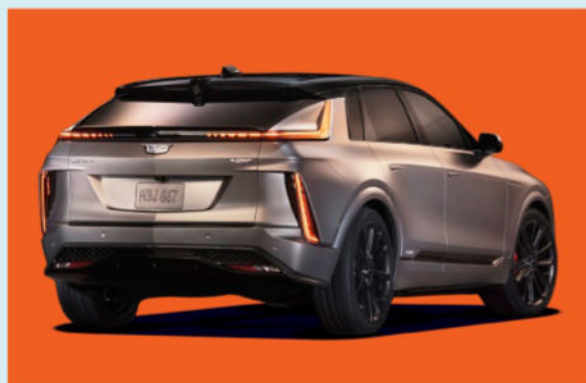
## The wilderness enjoyer

► **Technically this was revealed two** years ago, but it's only now that Volvo has got around to going into production with the EX30 Cross Country. Weird that it should forget that it has such a handsome car ready to roll, but then again it had some pretty big fish to ferment (like sorting out a tonne of software issues and backing off from going full EV). As things settle, and Volvo clocks up one of its best years for sales ever, it's full speed ahead for a chunky baby crossover that can handle the Scandi wilderness. The all-wheel-drive Cross Country features a lifted ride height, optional all-terrain tyres and a bulky roof rack.



## The retina burner

► **GAH, MY EYES! MY EYES!** Who knows? Maybe Kia's new EV4 might look better in the real world, but these first official images of it in saloon form (there'll also be a less offensive-looking hatchback) are something to behold. No real surprises under the skin, just Hyundai Group's very good and very flexible E-GMP platform with 800-volt fast charging, capabilities for single- or dual-motor set-ups and a usable range north of 300 miles. It's aimed squarely at your Tesla Model 3s and your BYD Seals, and we can expect Air and GT-Line spec choices when the car goes on sale later in 2025.



## The stomach churner

► **Cadillac's quickest car is now** this one. Not any of your fiery V8-powered Blackwing nonsense here, thank you very much, but an electric crossover. The Lyriq V – the first electric Caddy to use the brand's high-performance suffix – comes equipped with Hyundai Ioniq 5 N-baiting power and, according to engineers, a similar level of enthusiast-focused tech. We're talking track and launch control modes, as well as a bespoke electric sound meant to stir the senses. Why are we covering this in a UK-based magazine? Because Cadillac's umpteenth attempt at sales in Europe means this could come here, too.



Hallmark the  
fourth CEO of  
the Stroll era  
at Aston



► **Five months into his new job**, Aston Martin CEO Adrian Hallmark has the confident air of a man who's certain his plan is going to work.

'How do you make a company successful? You've got to have a plan. That plan has got to be brawny and stable. You create excitement around it, but you don't create excitement by ripping it up every five minutes,' he says in a meeting room at Aston's Gaydon HQ. 'There's enough excitement to the products and the design, the way we activate them in the marketplace. But in here, I want it to be quiet, calm, boring and successful. That's the mission.'

The former Bentley boss is bullish: 'It's an opportunity to make it, for the first time in 112 years, sustainably profitable. The market has totally changed, as have the prospects for luxury car brands. In our price bracket, there are

I N D U S T R Y

# Boring business + exciting cars = a profitable Aston Martin

Colin Overland Production editor

## There's hay to be made from limited-edition cars with prices in seven figures, so long as they don't distract from the core models

around four times more people, each with around four times more wealth, than there were 20 years ago.'

So how will Aston grab a bigger share of that lucrative market? 'In the last four years we've gone through this almost frenzy of product development. Four cars launched in 18 months – I've never seen anything like it. It's almost worked. Any difficulties we've had, it's not been because of lack of money. We're spending at a rate we've never done before.'

'I'm not saying this year is going to be the [turning point]. We reset the business last year, and we've reset expectations for the next five years, and we've reset the sense of how we're going to get there [profitability].'

The trick now is to slow down the rate of new-car launches and instead emulate rivals such as Porsche, Lamborghini, Ferrari and Rolls-Royce, by offering customers a huge range of options and by frequently adding new variants of those cars. Hallmark notes that the Porsche 911 will be offered in around 15 flavours in a five-year period, whereas the habit at Aston has been to launch a coupe, follow it with a convertible, and then... nothing.

'There's got to be a reason to buy another, better Vantage, and two years after that, another, better Vantage. We've never had that intensity of lifecycle innovation. The competition are doing it and we're not. We've never been as successful as we could be. We've put a lot of effort in the last few months into analysing ourselves and our competition, and developing a plan for each name plate.'

The profit to be had from options – different exhausts, audio upgrades, cosmetic changes – is 'phenomenal'.

And doing a variant of an existing model is relatively straightforward. 'The level of complexity to have a sportier version with a bit more power, or a more luxurious version with a bit more glamour, is marginal.'

There's also hay to be made from limited-edition cars with prices in seven figures, so long as they don't distract from the core models. 'Valiant was less than a year from concept to delivery. We need to slow it down a bit and get boring. We're going to use Vanquish and Valhalla as the basis to do a couple of specials – not just a different roof but a completely different concept, using the core technology from those two cars.'

At the other extreme of the line-up, he acknowledges that the DBX hasn't really achieved lift-off. Successful SUVs from Lamborghini and Rolls-Royce have transformed those companies' business models. But his experience at Bentley, which now does very well with the Bentayga, gives him hope.

'DBX has been in the market three and a half years, versus Bentayga nine years. In 2018 Bentayga was doing 3500-4000 a year, instead of nearly 8000 in 2023. What happened there was a facelift and a bit of communication. DBX I still fundamentally believe in.'

And what about the territory beyond Valhalla? Will there be a successor to the extreme Valkyrie? Especially now that Adrian Newey, that car's chief architect, is working for Aston's F1 team, it doesn't seem too wild a leap. Hallmark urges caution. 'Not many car companies

can afford, financially or emotionally, to do a car that's so far ahead of themselves and everybody else every year. It would kill you. For Ferrari, even Porsche, it's seven to 10 years between that kind of car.'

'Valhalla is somewhere between a regular supercar and a hypercar. We wouldn't want to do a new one of those every year either. But Valkyrie is incredible. Everything on that car is absolutely unique, never done before. Megacars – once a decade. Supercars – watch this space.'

The transition to electric has seemed to go on and off Aston's priority list over the years. Hallmark is clear: 'The general direction is still towards electrification. To get to net zero, we will add products in the hybrid space before we get to full electric. We will have our first electric car in this decade, but we will add hybrid derivatives as well through to 2035. We're fully committed to BEV, but there's no way we can go all-BEV overnight and sustain the company.'

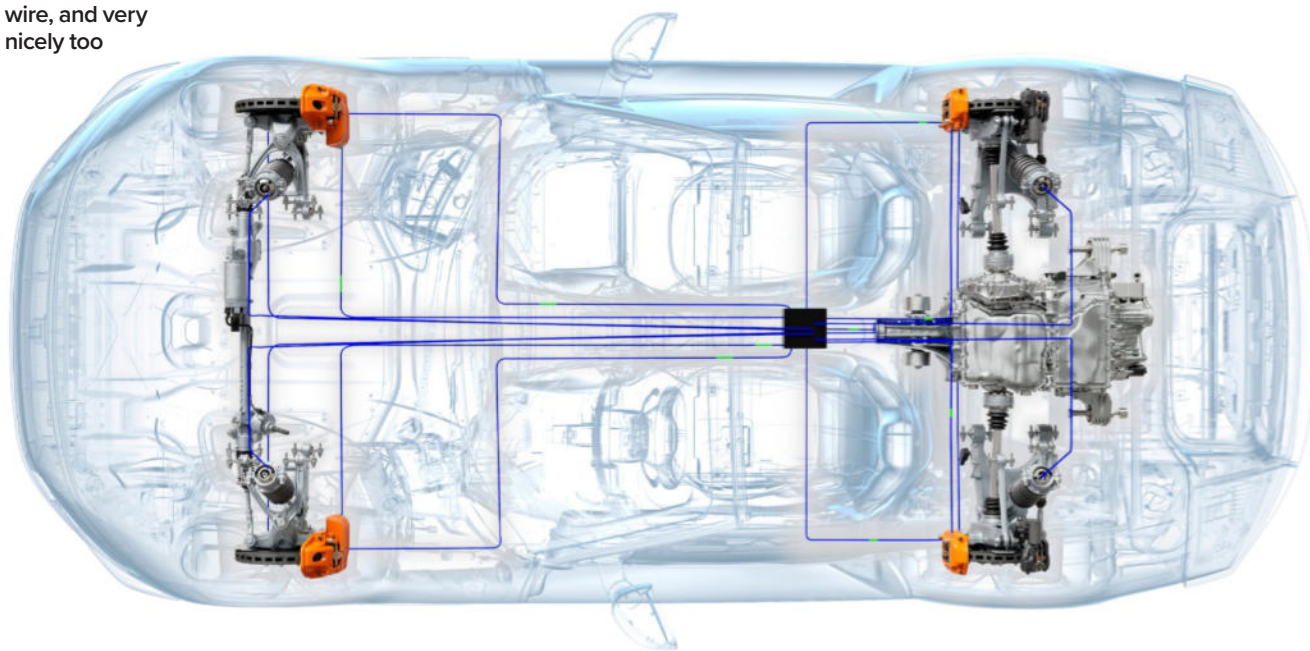
'We're not resisting. We're trying to manage through a period of high risk. We can't afford to do engines, hybrids and electric cars and just see which one's working – every one's got to be a winner.'

**Specials like Valiant bring big margins; DBX hasn't delivered on its potential**





12Cilindri does its braking by wire, and very nicely too



T E C H N O L O G Y

# ‘Drive by wire’ is the future. But there’s a catch

Jake Groves Deputy news editor

► **What do the Tesla Cybertruck**, the Lexus RZ family SUV and most of Ferrari’s line-up have in common? They’re all production cars using ‘by wire’ technology – an approach to engineering that replaces mechanical systems with electronics, controlling functions that can include braking, steering and acceleration.

Tesla’s beastly pick-up comes with steer-by-wire, while Lexus offers it as an option in some markets on its electric-only RZ. Bosch, meanwhile, is engineering its own proprietary by-wire technologies and is testing them on the road. Fellow German supplier ThyssenKrupp, which is also investigating by-wire controls, says the tech is ‘on the verge of a breakthrough.’ Ferrari is a whole leap further forward, using brake-by-wire tech in the Purosangue, 12Cilindri, 296 and SF90.

The benefits? Lower weight and better packaging possibilities because fewer physical components are needed. There’s also greater scope for adjusting the response to driver inputs. For instance, Bosch is trialling steer-by-wire systems that can be linked to drive modes and drastically change the weight and effort, as well as brake-by-

wire tech that doesn’t use a moving pedal but instead has a fixed pad you apply pressure to.

Bosch CEO Stefan Hartung is a leading advocate. ‘By-wire technology is a complexity management tool, because it takes that complexity away,’ he tells CAR.

Ferrari vehicle dynamics project lead Jacopo Canestri says: ‘The technology allows us the pedal feel that we want when using the same hardware, meaning we can fit it in a GT car, a sports car or anything else.

‘We can break the rules of a standard system with servos. You have leverage in that system; to send more power to the brakes you need more stroke. With by-wire, we can choose less stroke but still have the power we want.’

Francesco Comand, a Ferrari development driver, agrees: ‘It gives us complete freedom at the calibration phase. I believe that this technology, together with ABS Evo in our cars, are two of the most important innovations in braking since carbon ceramics.’

Many car makers also see by-wire tech as an enabler for autonomous driving. Once you remove the need to get software to control physical steering racks or hydraulic brake pedals, it’s simpler to develop vehicles with reliable Level 3 autonomy (where the car can do everything, although the driver needs to be ready to resume control).

The problem is security. Data from analytics provider Upstream, obtained by the Institute of the Motor Industry, points to a rapid increase in automotive cyber attacks in 2023. Around 35 per cent of those attacks focused on telematics data and apps, but 14 per cent targeted electronic control units in cars – devices that will be needed to control by-wire systems.

Piling in more systems that are controlled digitally could enable a hacker to drive a vehicle remotely. Standards for security are being drawn up, and will need to be convincingly impenetrable to win the confidence of drivers, car makers and insurers.



## MOTORSPORT

# Sorry Brad, but I'm afraid you just can't win

Colin Overland Production editor

► **He'll bounce back.** His skin seems to be pretty thick – thick enough to cope with the bad press garnered by a big chunk of his CV, including *Bullet Train* and *Ocean's Thirteen*. But for better or worse we're here to break the news to Brad Pitt: your new racing-themed movie, *F1*, will mostly just annoy and disappoint people.

We've not seen it. It might contain some very entertaining bits. It certainly seems to have been thoroughly researched, and a huge budget has gone into it. There's some significant talent on board with the project.

The problem is not how good or bad it is compared to other movies. The problem is that it is a movie.

After more than 100 years, a process of elimination has resulted in three types of film working really well, and everything else being a waste of time. Those three: superheroes blowing things up; troubled detectives hunting serial killers; mournful middle-aged people getting upset

Yes we're  
jealous.  
Doesn't mean  
we're wrong

about a childhood friend falling through the ice. Films about car racing: nowhere.

Instead, turn to TV and gaming for ingenious representations of the thrills, complexity, intrigue, danger and raw sex of motor racing. *Drive to Survive*, on Netflix, brings out quite brilliantly the aspects of modern Formula 1 – the politics, the money, the personality clashes, the toned bodies, the expensive haircuts – that appeal on the same sort of level as a soap opera or celebrity dating show.

And on your console, the *Forza* and *Gran Turismo* franchises, among others, look and sound amazing, with some lovingly crafted details. And crucially they do an incredible job of putting you in the thick of it. The more you concentrate, the more skill you acquire, the more laps you put in, the better you get – but it's different every time you play, keeping you on your toes.

Against all that, even the best racing movies seem patchy, with some boring bits, some implausible bits and a crushing predictability.

A couple of the best-rated motorsport-themed feature films of the last few years highlight the difficulty.

*Senna*, a documentary praised for conveying a sense of the complex character inside the yellow, black and green helmet, was hampered by the unavoidable problem that you know how it ends, and no amount of smart editing or well-informed analysis could change that.

*Ford v Ferrari*, the Matt Damon/Christian Bale-led fictionalised account of the Le Mans rivalry of the '60s, had some fine moments, and made the smart choice of focusing on the character of Ken Miles, played by Bale as a charismatic and moody obsessive. But there was an awful lot of standing around talking – sometimes in offices, sometimes in the paddock – and some weirdly cheesy shots of drivers making eye contact mid-race.

*F1* will do well to be as good as those, or *Rush* (James Hunt vs Niki Lauda), or *Ferrari*, starring Adam Driver as Enzo. (And before you mention *Le Mans*, *Grand Prix* etc from the '60s and '70s: have you actually watched them lately? *The Last American Hero* stands up well, though, as does the first *Cars*.)

The trailers are not encouraging. The story involves the fictitious Apex GP team, where veteran racer Sonny Hayes (Pitt) is mentoring youthful team-mate Joshua Pearce (Damson Idris). Javier Bardem is the team owner. Various real-life *F1* people also appear. It's directed by Joseph Kosinski, who did *Top Gun: Maverick*.

Pitt, while still being one of the most handsome men on the planet, just looks implausibly old for the role. The few snippets of dialogue in the trailers are podium-level cringe: 'We need to build our car for combat' indeed. There are a lot of sponsor logos visible. A lot.

And it feels as if you've seen it already; put it this way, it would be extremely surprising if the Apex cars finished 14th and 17th.

So, see you at the multiplex? Probably not. On a games console or on the sofa watching telly? Much better ideas.

Or you could even go and watch some actual racing in real life. Just a thought.



Turbulent times for Audi and its 'realistic and humble' CEO



► **My mental image of Audi CEO** Gernot Döllner is as a 19th century German sea captain, clad in oilskins and lashed to the tiller of his cargo ship in the midst of a storm, knowing his precious cargo is wanted at his destination and that he has set the right course, but struggling grimly to hold that course as the wind howls and the rain whips and the sea boils around him.

A bit much? Döllner would probably agree with that image. The perfect storm Audi finds itself in consists of a plunge in demand for European premium brands in China, once a source of huge sales and profit; flat or declining demand in Europe; a drop in European EV sales and a particularly tough home market in Germany. And to the headwinds that affect all car makers, add Audi's current model renewal. In 2024 and '25 it will launch more than

I N D U S T R Y

## The only way is up... he hopes

**Ben Oliver** Contributing editor

## Döllner plans a straight route through the storm. His focus for future model development is getting Audi's core cars right

20 new models. That process is hard on sales as old models wind down and new ones ramp up.

Audi's sales figures for 2024 featured so much red that they resembled a crime scene more than a spreadsheet. Global sales were down 12 per cent, EV sales down eight per cent, and China down 11 per cent.

To Audi's present woes, add the impending impact of Donald Trump's threatened tariffs, not only on the cars it makes in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia, but on the Q5s it builds in Mexico to send across the border.

Döllner plans a straight route through the storm. Complete that model renewal, use a complex mix of powertrains and body styles to meet varying customer and regulatory demands, and focus his future model development on getting Audi's core cars right.

If a change of course were required, Döllner would be the man to make it. After spending most of his career at Porsche, where he led the 918 and Panamera projects among others, he became VW Group's head of strategy, responsible for the astonishing deal to invest in US start-up Rivian and use its radically simpler electronic architecture across the group in place of systems it had tried and largely failed to develop itself. Audi will get the Rivian tech first and is also collaborating with Huawei in China: Vorsprung durch someone else's Technik, perhaps.

'What we're seeing right now is like weather,' says Döllner, who is affable and approachable for a German CEO. He smiles a lot, listens, and remembers what you've said and refers back to it. 'Every transition goes in waves, and right now the wave for EVs is down. But the worldwide trend to pure electric is like climate change, not weather. We haven't paused on them for a second, and we will have a full electric portfolio by the middle of next decade.'

'But there is a bridging period of 10 years, during which we'll have the flexibility of combustion engines, plug-in hybrids and battery electric vehicles. It's very, very expensive to have this parallel strategy. We had to double our portfolio to cover both the combustion and electric side. But the positive is that we are almost over the mountain. From now on we will keep both worlds fresh, and we see ourselves in a very good position.'

I ask him how frustrating it is to make long-term plans, but to then see the regulations they're based on change almost every year, at the whim of US and EU policy makers. 'The most important thing for us is absolute stability,' he says. 'I'm fine going all-electric by 2030 or 2035. We have a strategy for that. But if we discuss it every year the customer will be confused and ends up not buying and that's not helpful for this transition.'

And what about tariffs? 'We believe in free trade and we think that tariffs are wrong. Competition is global. Tariffs only block it for a while, and give you a false sense of security. You have to keep pace.'

He confirms the A1 and Q2 will be replaced as the entry-level Audis by new, pure-electric models. The other gap that needs plugged is at the other end, I suggest, with a rival to the BMW X7. Döllner doesn't confirm the Q9 name, but confirms it's coming. 'I share your view,' he

says, 'and we are working on that.'

I wonder if the focus on Audi's core cars to get it through the present storms and the cost of developing three types of drivetrains across umpteen models will affect the nice-to-have stuff that makes us want an Audi in the first place, like the sports cars and the new Formula 1 team. F1 is safe, it seems.

'We are realistic and we are humble,' Döllner says. 'It will take until the end of the decade to be able fight for the podium, but the programme is set up and invested and for sure we are able to fulfil our plans until then.'

But the news is less good on sports cars. CAR has previously reported that the C-Sport, Audi's take on the electric Cayman/Boxster, isn't progressing because the price is coming in way too high, and that successors to the R8 and e-Tron GT have been paused until the seas are calmer. So is there a sports car in Audi's immediate future? 'We have ideas in mind and at the right point of this transition, we will make them,' Döllner tell me.

But does that mean they are active projects? He smiles knowingly. It seems not. 'I would say they're definitely active in our heads, yeah.'

**Döllner has confirmed a big electric crossover is coming**







NEW CARS

# Strange but true: a Rolls-Royce with launch control

Colin Overland Production editor

► **Like the mountains** and the valleys, Rolls-Royce is just there, unchanging as far as the casual onlooker is concerned. However, just as those geological fixtures turn out to be in a state of constant flux upon closer examination, so too is Rolls-Royce capable of the odd innovation, just so long as you know how to interpret the cryptic messages coming out of Goodwood.

First, the easy bit. The new Black Badge Spectre is the most powerful production Rolls-Royce car ever. It peaks at 650bhp and 793lb ft, up from the 664bhp and 577lb ft outputs of the regular Spectre, the super-luxury electric super-coupe that arrived in 2023 and came close to being the company's best seller last year.

Black Badge is the largely but not entirely cosmetic treatment that Rolls offers as an alternative spec on most models, making them appeal to a generally younger bunch of buyers, many of them buying their first Rolls.

In the case of the Spectre, the Black Badge treatment involves new colour options including Vapour Violet, inspired by the neon-lit 1980s and '90s nightclubs remembered fondly by customers. There's a new design of 23-

inch wheel. There's a new backplate behind the grille, in a choice of colours. The steering weight has been increased and roll stabilisation adjusted to give more feedback and less bodyroll. The usual, more or less.

Zoom in on the software, though, and you enter a surprising new realm. Other Rolls-Royces have Low mode, which is a bit like a sport mode: it increases gearchange speeds, and holds on to lower gears longer when you're accelerating. But the Spectre doesn't have a gearbox. As the first electric Black Badge, this presents a whole new world of software-facilitated possibilities.

Hence Infinity mode. Press the infinity symbol on the steering wheel and the full 485kW is available, with more direct throttle response.

And then there's Spirited mode, named after the Merlin engine from the now-separate aero part of Rolls-Royce, as used in the Supermarine Spitfire, where pushing a switch would give a burst of extra power. In the case of the Black Badge Spectre it's launch control by another name. You hold the brake and accelerator pedals down, wait for the signal then release the brake and head for the horizon. The 0-60mph time drops from 4.4 to 4.1sec.

Engineering chief Bernhard Dressler said the upgrade was shaped in part by analysing data showing how Black Badge cars tend to be driven. Any extra performance is, this research revealed, used only in short bursts.

'Black Badge owners from around the world permitted our specialists to access their anonymised data, enabling us to create a new driving experience perfectly suited to – and validated by – the way our clients use their motor car. Following internal development, a small tranche of "secret" Black Badge Spectres was built for a group of clients who requested the earliest possible access to this motor car. They emphatically approved of our engineering response, highlighting the powerful connection between Rolls-Royce and its clients,' said Dressler.

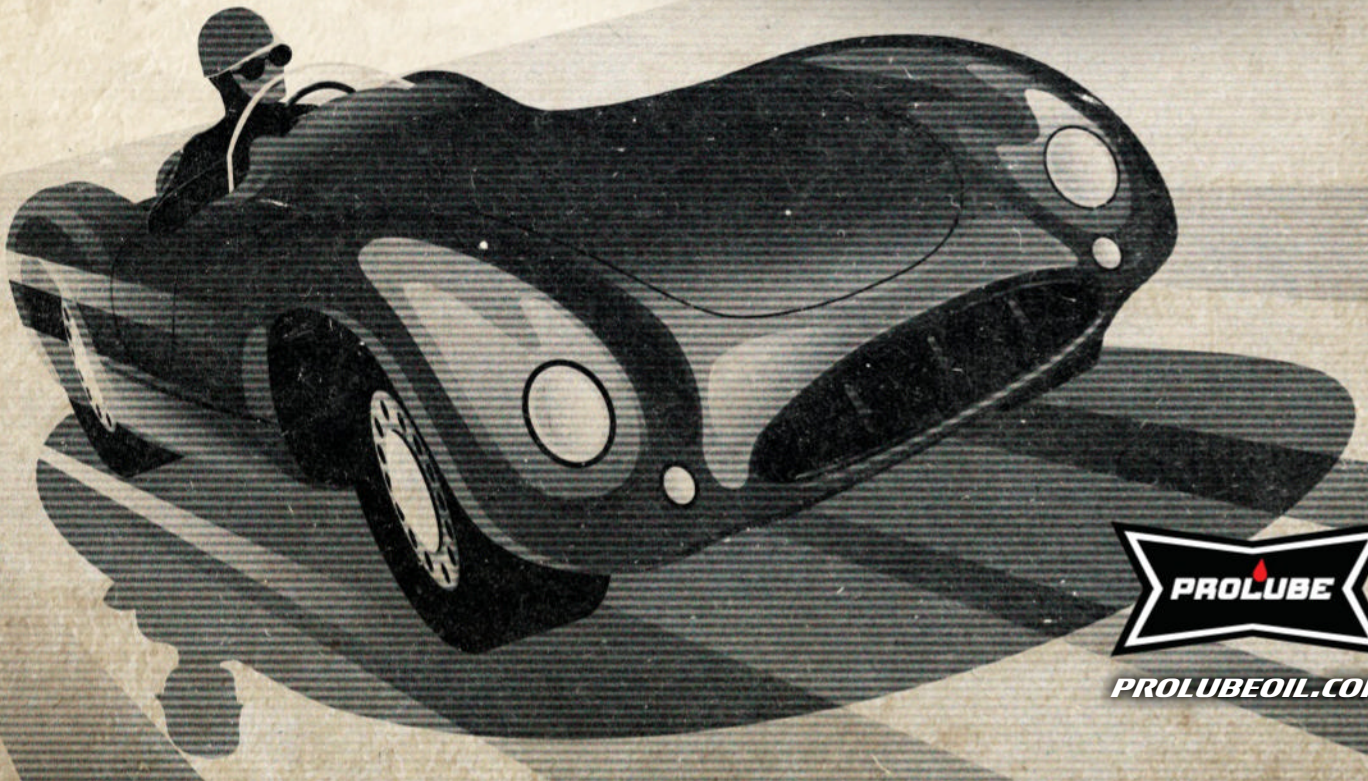


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# NCAP isn't helping

Ted Welford New cars reporter

► **Stellantis and Euro NCAP** do not currently see eye to eye on the question of safety. The independent safety organisation made a jab at the automotive group last year when the Jeep Avenger scored just three stars out of five.

Euro NCAP's secretary general Michiel van Ratingen said the Avenger's results demonstrated a 'clear lack of ambition' at Stellantis and that 'safety should not be where a manufacturer makes its savings'.

It's a pretty scathing remark. Thierry Koskas, Citroën CEO, has now responded in the same spirit, telling CAR he doesn't think there needs to be another organisation, other than governments, checking the safety of new cars.

'The requirements put in by Europe and by the different governments are already challenging enough and we think complying with the regulation is a good way to answer to the safety concern of the population.'

'I don't need see why any government would need an additional body to decide what should be the right safety.'

The last Citroën to face NCAP was the C5X back in 2022. The new C3 and C3 Aircross have not been tested by the safety organisation. Koskas strongly denied that any

**All car makers take safety seriously; not all dance to NCAP's tune**

corners had been cut when it came to safety and said Citroën fully supports 'more and more demanding' regulations. He also insisted the relatively low-cost new Smart Car platform that underpins the C3 and other Stellantis products was not compromised on safety.

'We have a car that is very simple with few options – it's not something that is detrimental to customers. They are requesting simple things, not many trims, not many options. This is something that makes the car cheaper to produce, there are less parts in the car.'

It's in line with a shift in philosophy signalled back in 2021 by the Oli concept – less choice, less weight and less cost for both manufacturer and consumer. It all sounds very Dacia but Koskas rejects the idea that Citroën is to Stellantis what Dacia is to Renault. (Dacia has also had some run-ins with NCAP.)

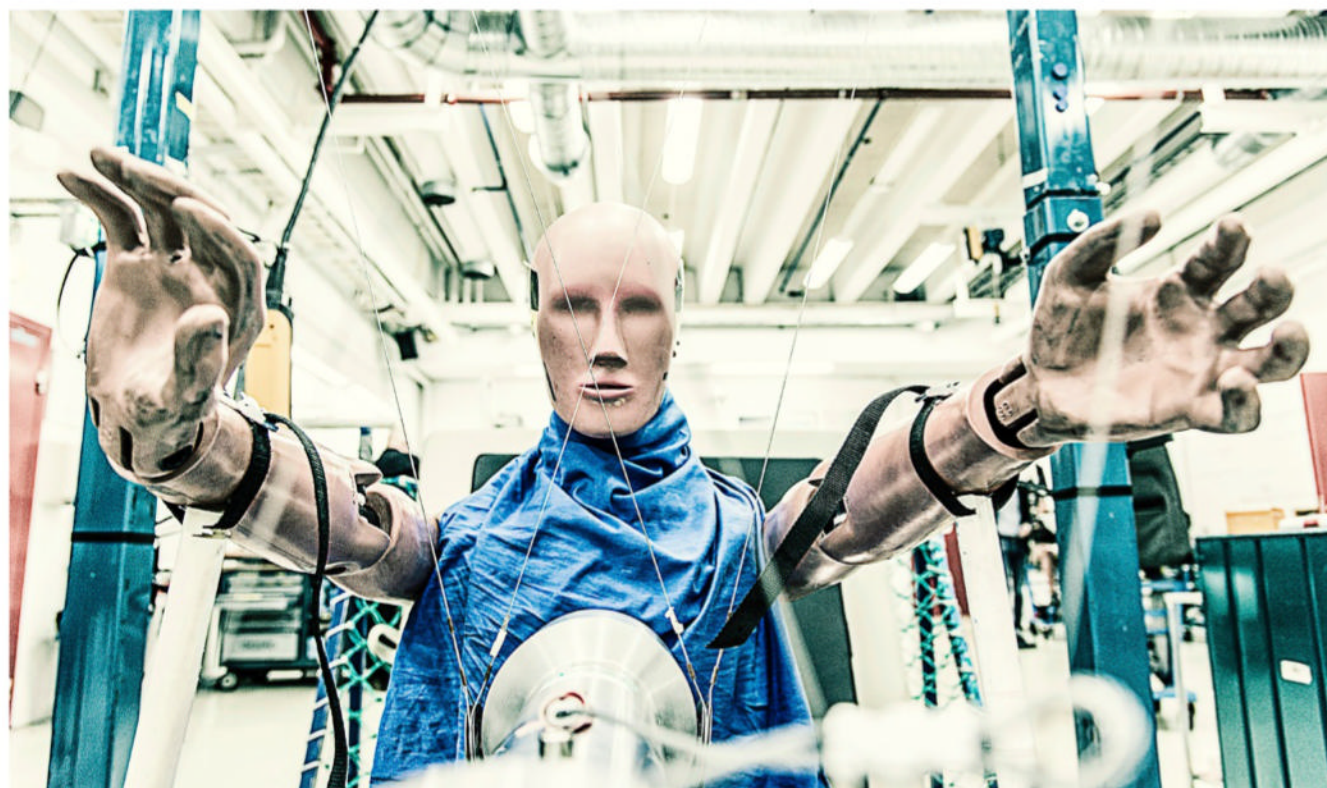
'We are not Dacia because we have more than 100 years of history, we have very strong values, we have iconic models, so I don't want to be compared.' Even so, Koskas is bullish about the relative merits of the C3 over the Sandero, as well as the C3 Aircross against the Duster when discussing the matter further.

Customers may in fact be wooed away from Citroën by Chinese brands – including, potentially, Leapmotor, a name arriving in the UK this year with help from Stellantis, utilising the group's showrooms and existing sales platforms.

It's a bold move, not least when Citroën is introducing its lower-cost electric cars, and fellow Stellantis brands Fiat and Vauxhall are doing similar with their Grande Panda and Frontera.

But Koskas isn't worried.

'Whether they are there internally or externally, they are there anyway. This is a competition that exists and it's possibly the biggest challenge we have. At the end of the day there is space for everyone.'



The exquisite  
Ferrari 488  
Pista Spider



NEW FERRARIS

# This year's most important new Ferrari isn't the electric one

Ben Miller Editor

► **This year promises to be** a busy one in Maranello, with a bunch of new product launches culminating in the hotly anticipated all-electric Ferrari at the end of the year. That car is a big deal. But the hardcore, track-focused versions of the 296 GTB and 296 GTS droptop matter even more. Why? Because their reception will validate – or not – Ferrari's hybrid R&D trajectory.

Recently a friend and I were wandering the prestige showroom in which he works, only to pause next to a 458 Speciale. 'The best car Ferrari's ever made?' he found himself saying out loud. I couldn't disagree. For a long time the relationship between technology, driving experience and desirability was linear. Add a new technology and you made the car better to drive and more desirable.

But those days are gone. Porsche's GT division sticks to naturally-aspirated flat-sixes in its GT3 and GT3 RS 911s because it believes that, while infinitely more powerful and straightforward to engineer for emissions testing,

turbocharged engines lack the required throttle response and musicality. And when it finally arrives, the Bugatti Tourbillon – for all its V16 magnificence – will likely not be any quicker in real terms than creator Mate Rimac's other hypercar, the all-electric Rimac Nevera. But the Bugatti will undoubtedly be more exciting to drive and, by Rimac's own admission, easier to sell. Where once new technology sold itself, now car makers must sell it.

Despite its elevated price point and power output versus the F8 Tributo, the 296 GTB, with its hybrid twin-turbo V6 powertrain, has always felt like a car from the same bloodline, the dynasty that gave us the likes of the F355, the 360 and the 458 Italia. The special versions of those cars have long threatened Ferrari's flagships for driver appeal and investment potential. And the 458 Speciale was the best of the bunch, a creation that combined an essentially 20th century engine philosophy (a high-revving piston engine breathing at atmospheric pressure) with 21st century chassis and driver-assist technology.

A tough act to follow, then. But Ferrari did it. The 488 Pista proved that new technology could be spooned into the mix without ruining the recipe. Its mid-mounted V8 was turbocharged, you'll recall, but the Pista remained mesmerising to drive nonetheless, taking much of what made the Speciale so, erm, special and adding even more ferocity to the performance. Just as the 455 Speciale won CAR's Sports Car Giant Test in 2014, so the Pista did the same in 2018, winning ahead of a strong field (McLaren Senna, Porsche 911 GT2 RS, Alpine A110).

We're due a hardcore 296 this year, and if it can hit the same heights as the Pista – and in the process shatter any lingering doubts we may harbour that hybridisation comes bundled with too many compromises to belong in cars of this ilk – then 2025 will have been a good year for Ferrari. If it can claim a place alongside the Speciale it will have been a great one.



**Taxman's  
enthusiasm  
for hybrid  
M5 is fickle**



## SALES TRENDS

# Wait. So hybrids are bad again?

**Nick Gibbs** Analyst

► **Here's what sounds like some** excellent news from JLR: global sales of its plug-in hybrids soared 163 per cent in the three months ending in December 2024.

In the world of legislation-driven electrification, however, a spike in growth like this coming as it does so late in the year is less a cause for celebration and more a clanging alarm. It almost certainly means an important global market decided from the start of the new year to shut the door on some loophole or incentive that, for a while, gave an electrified drivetrain a boost.

And so it proved here.

France, that inveterate hater of big SUVs, had widened the net for its weight-based 'malus' tax penalty on heavier cars to include plug-in hybrids. Car makers scrambled to push out cars before the tax hit and as a result France in December became briefly the largest PHEV market in Europe, with sales up 45 per cent. Land Rover finished

second in the PHEV chart, with sales up 600 per cent to 3899 for the month, according to figures from market analyst Dataforce via *Automotive News Europe*.

The tax change from 1 January adds €18,830 to the price of the best-selling Range Rover Sport P460E plug-in hybrid in France and effectively kills the market for large premium SUVs, which was 90 per cent plug-in hybrid last year, according to Dataforce.

France yanking away the football illustrates the perils for the plug-in hybrid in Europe. A similar thing happened in Belgium at the beginning of 2024 when company cars were targeted. The result? One of the biggest PHEV markets in Europe, with over 100,000 sales in 2023, tumbled 33 per cent last year, according to figures from European lobby group ACEA.

PHEV sales did increase in the UK last year, by 18 per cent to 167,178, led by the Ford Kuga, as car makers squeezed all the flexibilities available within the ZEV mandate (which sets the percentage of EVs manufacturers need to sell) to stay compliant. However, it wasn't enough to grow overall sales across Europe, which fell 3.9 per cent to just under a million, half that of pure EVs.

The drivetrain is billed as a useful bridging technology to electric in that you get a fairly big battery for local EV driving but also a combustion engine to salve those range worries on longer trips. The way the WLTP emission tests work means even hefty PHEVs like the Range Rover Sport record far lower carbon dioxide figures than humble non-plug-in hybrid superminis, leading to tax incentives almost as good as those for EVs.

But the European Union is very suspicious of the drivetrain and last year published a report based on data harvested from 2021 PHEVs showing that real-world emissions were on average 3.5 times worse than officially declared. The green cloak was whipped off, *Scooby-Doo* style, to reveal just another combustion-engined car.

In response the EU has changed the way it measures emissions on PHEVs starting from 1 January this year for newly launched vehicles and a year later for cars already on sale. In effect this doubles the recorded CO<sub>2</sub> for PHEVs, risking them straying out of their precious low-impact company-car tax brackets.

The car industry has responded by increasing the size of the battery, so for example the pack in the new VW Tiguan eHybrid jumps to 19.7kWh, nearly doubling the quoted electric range from the old one at 62 miles. That adds cost, meaning the Tiguan PHEV starts at £42,555, over £5000 more than a standard 1.5-litre petrol. It's also only two grand shy of the long-range electric VW ID. 4.

All this sounds like the plug-in hybrid is on borrowed time. In any case, the official position from both the EU and UK is that the sale of all cars with combustion engines stops from 2035.

But while some company-car drivers still have trouble unwrapping the charging cable, the 'fake EV' (a phrase popular among some green-minded critics of hybrids) remains a very useful introduction to electric motoring to a whole class of EV sceptics worldwide.



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LS aimed at a higher state of calmness than other cars

► **To understand Lexus, start with Sony.** Only people old enough to remember The Beatles' first LP will recall that 'Made in Japan' was once a stigma, not a guarantee of quality and refinement.

Sony changed that. Its founder, Akio Morita, had vision and guile. Just when Western Electric declared there were no commercial uses for the transistor its labs had invented, Morita found that, indeed, there were. Rather profitable ones, in fact.

Additionally, he had the wit to know that Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo was difficult for Western tongues and ears, so he invented the name Sony, happily suggesting both 'sound' and an affectionate name for a male child. And he eradicated Japan's reputation for shoddy products by committing to ingenious, continuously innovative technology

END OF AN ERA

# Sayonara to the Zen garden of the car world

Stephen Bayley Cultural commentator



## Acceleration is a nearly silent rush of well-mannered energy as if a million synchronised angels are giving you a shove in the back

and sophisticated design which set a world standard. Refusing to discount, he said: 'We are selling diamonds.'

Never mind that it has now more or less abandoned hardware to concentrate on cinema and gaming, 'Sony' remains an eponym for premium-priced excellence. This is where Toyota wanted to be.

Lexus came into existence in 1989, soon after the Toyota Corolla had become the best-selling car of all time. The ambition was now to build not just the world's most popular car, but the world's best car. But, unlike VW, its predecessor in that popularity role, the Corolla did not represent any form of ambition in technology, design or driving experience. It was a blameless, therefore emphatically dull, little car whose chief attribute was reliability.

Cars perform bravura tricks in the theatre of our imaginations, but very few people let their imaginations wander into concepts of service intervals and MTBF (mean time between failures).

Desire is the thing. Toyota wanted to engineer desire with a glamorous large car. No one wanted a big Corolla, so Toyota invented a premium brand. The name Lexus simultaneously suggests the concepts of the 'regal' and 'luxury' which, I suppose it's fair to say, is what many large-car buyers want.

The original Lexus LS had a shape explicitly inspired by the W126 Mercedes-Benz S-Class, especially in matters of proportion and the curves around the C-pillar and the nose profile. Originality in aesthetics was not in the plan, although the LS was a far more advanced proposition than Toyota's existing large car, the Century. This is the one you still see in Tokyo with lace antimacassars on the back seat and a driver with white gloves. Its appearance resembled a full-size American car of the early '60s.

But the Rekasasu, as it was known in Japan, could make claims of its own. The goal of serenity had been a target for the engineers. Perhaps they had a Zen tea-room in mind. Unusual quality too. It was claimed that the electrical connectors were gold because that metal's conductivity was specially high.

There was more from Toyota's busy Department of Myth-Making. People said there was a Lexus test-track somewhere in Japan where the surface rose by exactly 1cm in the course of a kilometre to replicate the curvature of the earth. Precision was king, even if that king was not fully dressed.

I drove an early LS and was astonished to the point of blinking by the powertrain. Noise and vibration were almost imperceptible. You could hardly tell if the engine was running. Pressing the accelerator produced a nearly silent rush of well-mannered energy as if a million synchronised angels were giving you a shove in the back along an endless channel of greased roller-bearings.

And it wafted along as though those same angels had commandeered a leather-upholstered waterbed. Of course, switches and secondary controls were superlative with no lost motion and disciplined graphics. The stereo was by Nakamichi, the caviar of audio.

And now the LS has been withdrawn from sale in the

UK, leaving Lexus with a range dominated by five SUVs, as humdrum in their way as the Corolla used to be. Fact is, they were always Toyotas. Another fact is: only three Lexus LSs were sold in the UK in 2024.

What we are seeing here is not just a failed experiment by Toyota, but a larger story of the endgame of the three-volume format. The story of Lexus is a threnody for the saloon, a car type belonging to the age of cufflinks. Individual customers for large saloons no longer exist in significant numbers: they are bought mostly by chauffeur businesses.

Lexus has a brand problem too. The thing with brands is that they cannot be created just like that. You have to wait. Brands are a promise. They are a bit like religion since they require belief. Nurture your product for long enough and it will eventually acquire the positive associations and pleasing expectations that define 'brand values'. The LS was not nurtured and then found itself on the wrong side of history.

In this sense, Lexus has failed. Once it was selling diamonds, but no longer. Sony is out of the game it started, so too is Lexus.

Detailing was  
always finely  
crafted on  
the LS





# First drives

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# The 300-mile test

NEW CAR MEETS REAL WORLD



FERRARI 12CILINDRI SPIDER

# The perfect storm

Sideways rain, hail and red weather warning gusts meet a rear-wheel drive V12 convertible. Ferrari's ultimate droptop GT braves Storm Herminia

Words Jake Groves Photography Olgun Kordal





Wipers on and  
the roof down:  
not ideal





**I**t was meant to be simple. Escape the UK – battered and bruised by Storm Eowyn – to the lighter and brighter Mediterranean to take full advantage of Ferrari's new 12Cilindri Spider. But west of Lisbon, with a dense rectangular Ferrari key in my hand, I'm all too aware that the sky is full of ominous clouds being hurled about by bellowing, howling winds. It seems I've escaped one storm only to end up in the clutches of another: Storm Herminia.

A good thing, then, that Ferrari says the 12Cilindri (a reminder for the class: *dodi-chi chilin-dri*) is its 'most complete' GT car ever – and therefore designed to cope with this outbreak of reality. It might just work. Yes, it's wetter and windier than you'd generally want, but in many ways this is prime GT territory. These coastal roads bordered by craggy, sea-blasted rocks look very dramatic, and I can just picture this Ferrari being a glamorous and graceful way to enjoy the scenery.

If Ferrari's touting this as the most well-rounded V12 car it's ever made, it should be in its element here. If only the elements, in the form of Storm Herminia, weren't currently threatening my very existence. I'm not being dramatic; some red 'threat to life' weather warnings have been issued in the area.

Standing next to the 12Cilindri, even as Herminia starts to push me around with its gusts, I'm trying to get my head around the styling. There's a lot going on; it's beset with every curve and angle imaginable. Is it classically pretty? Probably not. Is it as futuristic as Ferrari's charismatic design chief, Flavio Manzoni, says it is? That retro front end – very clearly inspired by the Daytona of the late '60s – makes it hard to swallow that argument whole. And yet I'm still captivated, staring at the details from all sides.

I love that visor-like band spanning the width of the nose, complete with the razor-thin winglets integrated into the headlight lenses, and the devil's-horn pair of active aero winglets that deploy at speed, and the squat stance. You're not short of details to ogle.

At the 12Cilindri's core sits a Ferrari staple and a feat of modern automotive engineering – something you can spend even more time ogling when the clamshell bonnet is tilted forward. Enzo himself once said 'the 12-cylinder will always be the original Ferrari', and engineers tell me they'll keep the V12 going as long as possible in the face of pressure to downsize and electrify.

It came as a relief and a surprise to many outside Ferrari – even perhaps to some *within* Ferrari too – that its phenomenal R&D efforts meant another V12 car could be



**Sunglasses?**  
More like storm protection

produced entirely unsullied by electrification. And, in line with the 12Cilindri's aim to be a proper GT car, this version of the 6.5-litre V12 allows for at least 80 per cent of total torque to be accessible as low as 2500rpm. That said, its maximum power output, 819bhp, comes just 250 revs short of the car's 9500rpm redline.

Right now, though, the 12Cilindri's performance is well and truly corked. The windscreen wipers are on overdrive as I scythe through the Sintra-Cascais national park – an emerald jewel of thick forests, mountainous tracks and Inquisition-era architecture – as the 12Cilindri's V12 doesn't give even 2000rpm the time of day, and the *manettino* is locked into Wet mode.

There's no getting around the fact this is a big car, its girth feeling disconcerting across the skinny, lumpy ribbons of tarmac that ringfence the national park. A brief opening in the traffic (made up of dawdling locals and indignant tourists wondering where the sun's gone) allows me to push a little harder as tight switchback corners string together one after the other, and Ferrari's technical wizardry is brought forward.

The 12Cilindri has Maranello's 'virtual short-wheelbase' technology that debuted on the F12tdf – effectively all-wheel steering under a showier name – and it's fantastically fluid, to the point it really does feel like the 12Cilindri's wheels are about two feet closer together than they physically are. There's an innate agility here that belies the car's size – and I'm curious to dig deeper. But Herminia's far from done. I'm chomping at the bit to really open the engine up... and get the sodding roof down.

I speculate that the more inland I go, the less cack the ►

#### Pick-up: 0 miles



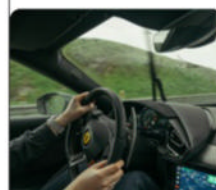
One of the most visually divisive modern Ferraris. Still, whether you think it's a Daytona clone or boldly futuristic, it still looks like a Ferrari.

#### 12 miles



How very 2025: buttons for driving assistance and start/stop in a Ferrari. HELE is Ferrari's name for start/stop: high emotion, low emission. Cringe.

#### 77 miles



Rain's not letting up, so I power north. Not pictured: me climbing out of the car to reach a toll booth. Not the glamorous bit of a road trip.





Spider's backside is less divisive than the coupe's



Why be a recluse when you have a Ferrari?

**142 miles**



Our reward for persevering: some fabulously twisty and empty roads. Forest wildfire warnings set to maximum don't really apply today.

**181 miles**



Quick stop for Portugal's tastiest snack, the *pastel de nata*. Even the mass-produced version of this custard tart sold at petrol stations tastes wonderful.

**226 miles**



Around 85 per cent of Portugal is Catholic, hence the ornate altars and shrines in every village. Quick prayer logged requesting a break in the rain.



## The V12 is electrifying, filled with a full set of sensory cliches

weather will be given the brunt of the weather warnings are coastal. I point north-eastwards to escape the claustrophobic roads that litter the area in search of bigger scenery and swoopier roads. A stretch up Portugal's A1 – connecting Lisbon with Porto and running parallel with the Tagus river – is a good litmus test for the 12Cilindri's supposed grand touring clout.

Like many modern Ferraris, the interior feels like it's missing a bit of theatre by not having a physical ignition switch – a detail neighbouring Sant'Agata still favours. But I love the 'transmission gate' motif for the drive select switches, and the driver's instruments only need a GCSE in IT, rather than the master's degree required to work the equivalent in the Roma.

I don't feel like I'm left wanting for much in here. The 12Cilindri comes with a central infotainment screen designed to make the cockpit more occupant-friendly (which may have made more sense in the four-seat Purosangue). The driving position is highly adjustable, and that central display is usable... enough. Its positioning and height aren't quite right if you want to make truly confident taps at the screen at speed, and some of the settings (such as activating the seat massagers or neck warmer, if you've opted for them) are still a faff to switch on.

Wet mode means, among other things, that the 'bumpy road' suspension setting is active, allowing the car to absorb more jolts without becoming unsettled – useful when the very real threat of aquaplaning rears its ugly head once or twice as my journey progresses.

Overall, though, the 12Cilindri's ride is a very sweet balance at a cruise; a low-slung and big-wheeled sports car it may be, but it can tackle bridge expansion joints and lumpy potholes without you needing to urgently book an appointment with a chiropractor. The snag is, though, that the standard-fit Michelin Pilot Sport 5 tyres are quite noisy, taking the edge off the refinement inside. And, incidentally, the roar obscures a sweet low-lying melody the V12 plays at this pace – as if it's whining and hungry for a flex of throttle, like a hound overdue a walk.

Glimmers of blue sky appear as I surge further north – my progress interrupted only by having to come to a complete stop and climb halfway out of the car at three separate toll booths; a manoeuvre impossible to perform with your dignity entirely intact. Spearing off the highway, I

reach for the roof switch quickdraw as beams of sunlight cut through the grey clouds. Finally – a bit of sun, even if it's only for 10 minutes.

Out on the eastern edge of Portugal, the roads are a true hidden gem; they're wide, well sighted and sweeping, providing few opportunities to be caught out and giving me a real chance to push harder. Clack goes the *manettino* switch out of Wet, straight past Sport and into Race, the open air above me moist with the evaporating water from the road beneath me. I carve the Ferrari smoothly around long corner after long corner until I hit the holy grail: the road opening up and straightening out. No traffic. None.

I floor it, and the revs climb and climb and climb. The V12 is finally unleashed, its shriek cutting into the atmosphere. Any notion that this is an engine that has been made quieter to meet regulations seems laughable as its symphony assaults my eardrums. It's an electrifying moment when it ultimately happens, filled with a full set of sensory cliches: adrenaline racing, goosebumps, hair standing to attention, sweaty palms – the whole nine yards. The power delivery is creamy smooth, the eight-speed dual-clutch transmission ready for the moment I yank the right shift paddle, committing to a second hit of the intoxicating noise like the rush of a potent drug.

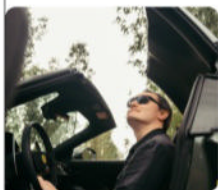
Expletives are said out loud, I'll admit, as my jaw hits my lap. There it is – what I've been searching for this whole time: the Ferrari magic.

Confidence grows and the smile widens as more miles of sweeping corners up the N2 road are strung together, even if the amount of spray from the increasing drizzle is dampening my brow. There's not much buffeting at speed with the roof down, I'm pleased to discover, thanks to a ►



Sports car or GT? Regardless, it's got presence

### 275 miles



Our prayers are answered, and the clouds part long enough for me to think it's a good idea to open the roof. It can close again in seconds.

### 293 miles



Hard-charging cross-country is thirsty work. Pre-payment fuel pumps continue to baffle me... particularly when they're in Portuguese.

### 334 miles



Not complaining, but after a day's driving I realise my back aches, suggesting this is less a GT, more a sports car. And what a sports car...





## Data

### PRICE

From £366,500

### POWERTRAIN

6496cc 48v V12,  
eight-speed  
dual-clutch auto,  
rear-wheel drive

### PERFORMANCE

819bhp @ 9250rpm,  
500lb ft @ 7250rpm,  
3.0sec 0-62mph,  
211mph+

### WEIGHT

1620kg

### EFFICIENCY

17.8mpg,  
360g/km CO2

### ON SALE

Now

### RATING

★★★★★

pair of aerodynamic humps behind the headrests keeping the 12Cilindri slippery.

I still can't fully get used to the width, but the 12Cilindri's alacrity on back roads is encouraging. Ferrari's engineers have provided you with all the necessities to enjoy a road like this: steering that's super accurate and well weighted, alert without being twitchy but fluid and communicative. The brake-by-wire technology is impressive, too, feeling similar to a McLaren in that the pedal barely moves due to its high resistance. It translates the flex of a single tendon directly to the enormous carbon ceramic discs awaiting command after command.

Ferrari has thrown all sorts of technology at the driving experience. Honestly, there are so many abbreviations on the spec sheet it can feel like a puzzle as you try to translate them all. But, while huge fun, threading the 12Cilindri across the landscape still requires concentration, care and nerve. Particularly in such changeable conditions.

Where does all this leave our perception of what type of car this is? The 12Cilindri is proudly labelled as a GT, positioned bang in the centre of Ferrari's model range (with Roma and Purosangue book-ending one side, while 296 and F8o tackle the other) and in many ways it is precisely that. The 12Cilindri is a visually arresting machine, and its engine has the correct number of cylinders; even if it's been slightly muted to satisfy noise regulations it still sings a spine-tingling tune and has enough power to force feed you with adrenaline. Pace. Grace. A little bit of boot space (although not that much here, in reality).

If I was doing the same drive in a more unambiguous GT, such as the Bentley Continental GT, wafting from idyllic village to epic vista, my pulse rate would be so low that some doctors would call time. Here, though, I'm hunkered down, steely eyed and clenching my jaw. I'm not complaining, mind you, as I'm having huge fun in the process. Ferrari offers scintillating performance, one-with-machine handling and sweaty-palm-inducing acceleration that Bentley can only dream of. But this isn't the easy ride that would befit a true grand tourer.

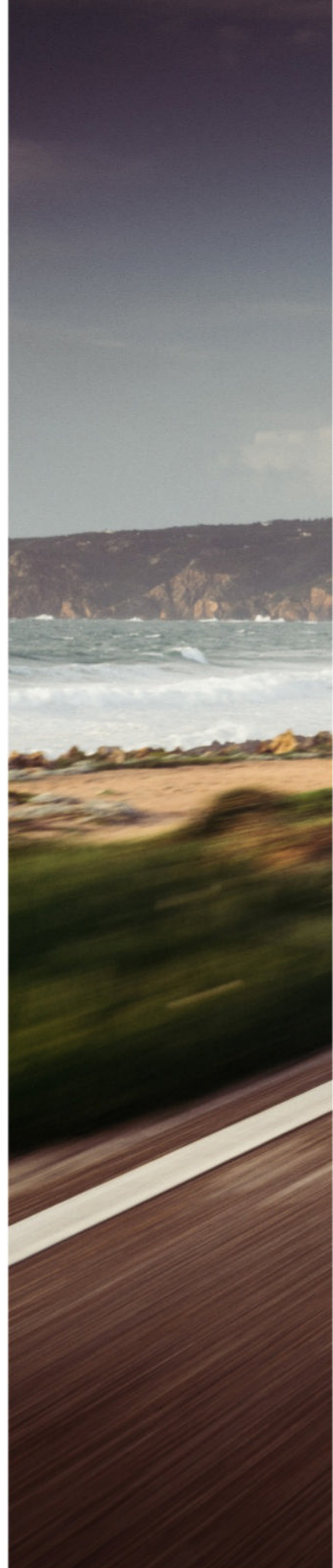
And that's sort of where the wires get crossed. Here, in the 12Cilindri, my back is sore after more than 300 miles in these hard and thin seats (yes, even with massaging functionality), and the tyres are noisy. For me, at 6ft 2in, the neck warmer in the seat is more like a shoulder warmer.

If I want a grandiose road tripper that'll still be fiercely quick but transport me in ultimate luxury, I'm calling Crewe – not Maranello. But frame it as an all-round sports car and it's fabulous, and we should be thankful it exists. Thankful Ferrari's V12 lives on. Thankful that Maranello has managed to make a supercar tackle a storm of emissions and noise legislation the same way this Verde Toscana convertible has tackled an actual storm and came out the other end to witness a gorgeous sunset.

It's thrilling. Exhilarating. Addictive. Chasing that 9500rpm redline is a thrill that could keep you happy for the rest of your days, and one that I will continue to crave for the rest of mine. **car**

## Next Month

**DACIA'S BIGSTER:**  
THE BARGAIN FAMILY SUV





Chasing that exhilarating  
9500rpm redline could  
keep you happy for the rest  
of your days

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**Sound deadening  
has clearly been  
scaled back to cut  
the price, but it  
drives well**

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A seven-seat  
crossover. Just  
don't try to  
seat seven in it

CITROËN C3 AIRCROSS

# The left behind

Top-value family transport. But forget claims of room for seven

Looking for a cheap new seven-seater? The Dacia Jogger is the obvious choice, but Citroën has other ideas. It doesn't like to spell it out, but clearly Citroën's on a mission to usurp Dacia as the European value champion with the new C3 Aircross.

The car has two tricks up its sleeve. First, in its electric form it's now the cheapest electric SUV, at £22,990. Second, it's the only B-segment crossover you can have with seven seats. Albeit only if you choose it as a petrol or hybrid; the raised floor of the EV doesn't allow for such space.

It's appealing on paper – the answer to many a budget-conscious family's prayers. But the third row of seats is next to useless for all but toddlers. Climbing into the back requires gymnast levels of flexibility. And once you're in, good luck with your efforts to click the second row into place without injury. Even better luck trying to get out.

The boot is also hilariously small when all seven seats are in place. And you pay £765 to have the third row, whereas it's included in the price of a Jogger.

If you keep your money in your pocket and go for the standard five-seat C3 Aircross, it makes more sense. The boxy shape gives plenty of headroom, and legroom in the second row is easily on par with cars from the class above.

The C3 Aircross is the latest price-trimming Stellantis product built on the Smart Car platform. It's fundamentally the same car as the Vauxhall Frontera, but around £500 cheaper in a like-for-like configuration. Unlike the Vauxhall, it's also offered with a cheaper 98bhp 1.2-litre petrol, unhybridised, with a six-speed manual gearbox and a manual handbrake.

The EV uses a small 44kWh battery paired with a 111bhp motor. Getting to 62mph takes a lethargic 12.7 seconds and the range is limited to just 188 miles.

The mild hybrid uses a 1.2-litre petrol engine made of 40 per cent new components. A small electric motor is housed within the



Neat, modern, comfortable, and quite loud

six-speed automatic transmission, with the battery stored under the front left seat to maximise space. With 134bhp at its disposal, 0-62mph takes 10.1 seconds, marginally faster than the base petrol version. Though it can run for short stretches as an EV, it's not massively efficient. Citroën's figure of up to 57mpg is rather optimistic.

It's also not very refined, with a vocal engine on idle and lots of tyre and wind noise. Sound deadening has clearly been scaled back to cut the C3's price.

But the Aircross generally drives well. There's less roll than you'd expect from a top-heavy SUV and the steering, though light, is well-judged and easy to place through a flowing corner.

Comfort is its best attribute. Even on rougher surfaces, it remains comfortable and never jarring. That said, the Frontera doesn't feel much different.

The standard seats are excellent, and elements such as a squared-off steering wheel make it feel more expensive than it is. While there are plenty of cheaper plastics, it generally feels better than its price suggests.

TED WELFORD

## First verdict

Not far off Dacia levels of value. An appealing family car, but rubbish as a seven-seater. The EV is the best version ★★★★★



### THE FIRST HOUR

#### 1 minute

It's basically a better-looking Frontera, isn't it?

#### 3 minutes

Our first car has an engine light on – never the greatest start

#### 10 minutes

New car, no engine light. Result! Can customers change cars this quickly?

#### 30 minutes

A very comfortable way of travelling. Just wish it wasn't so noisy

#### 50 minutes

A failed attempt at sitting in the third row. It is tiny back here

### PLUS

Smart looks; attractive price; lots of space in the second row

### MINUS

Useless as a seven-seater; unrefined engine; noisy to travel in

| Data | PRICE                                        | POWERTRAIN                                                        | PERFORMANCE                                                   | WEIGHT | EFFICIENCY                | ON SALE |
|------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------|---------|
|      | £25,740 (Hybrid 136 Max; range from £20,240) | 1199cc 12v three-cylinder, six-speed automatic, front wheel-drive | 134bhp @ 5500rpm, 151lb ft @ 1750rpm, 10.1sec 0-62mph, 125mph | 1451kg | 47.3-57.4mpg, 121g/km CO2 | Now     |



JAECOO 7

Big. Ugly. Dull. Cheap

Competitive pricing should make this new SUV a familiar sight

Meet Jaecoo, another brand poised to crack the UK car market. The name is a mash-up of jaeger, the German for hunter, and coo as in cool, and it's owned by Chery Automotive. Chery is the Chinese giant behind the also-new Omoda marque, which has made a big impact in the UK in a short time, targeting value-conscious mainstream buyers.

Jaecoo is following in its slipstream, but aims to be more upmarket, and has already established a beachhead in the UK; it's opened 71 dealerships so far, with a target of 130 by the end of the year.

Chery's masterplan for the UK is a salvo of high-value products in every shape, size and powertrain, with Omoda and Jaecoo launching cars alternately. Omoda's 5 was first, then this, then an Omoda 9 is on the way, then a Jaecoo 5 will follow.

The 7's key selling point is price: it's Kia Sportage-sized, but with a price range between £29,435 and £35,065 it'll be attracting a mix of customers, some drawn by the amount of car they can get for their money, others by the glitz.

Jaecoo gives you three powertrains to choose from: a 1.6-litre petrol with either two- or all-wheel drive, and a plug-in hybrid that combines a turbocharged 1.5-litre petrol engine, an 18.3kWh battery and an electric motor.

The entry-level 1.6 makes 145bhp, hits 0-62mph in 10.3 seconds and peaks at 112mph; while the all-wheel-drive version can manage 0-62mph in 11.8 seconds before going on to the same top speed. Efficiency figures are 37.7mpg for the two-wheel-drive car and 35.3mpg for the AWD.

We drove the range-topping PHEV or SHS (Super Hybrid System in Jaecoo-speak), which has a combined power output of 204bhp, with a 0-62mph time of 8.5sec and maximum speed of 108mph. It has an electric-only range of 56 miles.

The 'super' bit? SHS uses the engine and regen to stop the battery ever running out of charge, so you're never carrying around



From the people who brought you Omoda

useless cells – very much like the powertrain as the BYD Seal U DM-i hybrid, a close rival. That's a good decision, because the Jaecoo pulls away silently in EV mode and smoothly switches between electric and combustion without an awkward shuffle.

It accelerates steadily rather than rapidly. Still, combine that with a firm but well damped ride, along with minimal noise, and the SHS feels smooth and refined for the money. But the steering is light and somewhat vague, while the brakes are pretty snatchy. It's an odd mismatch.

The experience in the cabin is better, though. You get a large touchscreen in whichever trim you buy, but of particular note is the huge 14.8-inch panel in the Luxury model. It's slick and responsive, smartphone integration takes seconds and there are plenty of opportunities to personalise it.

There's a panoramic sunroof along with lots of storage space, sockets and a Qi wireless charging pad. Considering just how much kit is fitted as standard, it's an achievement that it doesn't feel cluttered.

CURTIS MOLDRICH

First verdict

Looks good on a spreadsheet but offers little in the way of enjoyment or personality, just a good price

★★★★



THE FIRST HOUR

2 minutes

Looks like a Land Rover with an Edwardian school radiator glued to the nose

10 minutes

This feels a lot like a BYD Seal U DM-i to drive

25 minutes

Hybrid system transitions smoothly

40 minutes

Firm but fair ride, although the steering and brakes aren't so well calibrated

50 minutes

Still searching for some character

PLUS

Keen price; plenty of infotainment; feels robust

MINUS

Fidgety ride; inconsistent driving controls

|      | PRICE                | POWERTRAIN                                                                  | PERFORMANCE                              | WEIGHT | EFFICIENCY                                                | ON SALE |
|------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Data | £35,065 (SHS Luxury) | 18.3kWh battery, 1499cc turbo four-cyl plus e-motor, CVT, front-wheel drive | 204bhp, 228lb ft, 8.5sec 0-62mph, 108mph | 1795kg | 403mpg, 56-mile electric range, 23g/km CO2 (all official) | Now     |

Are you thinking hunter? Are you thinking cool?





**It pulls away  
silently and  
switches smoothly  
between electric  
and combustion**



**It's not as  
entertaining as  
its rivals. Nor is it  
anything special  
as a family car**

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Red stripe  
signals it's  
a Nismo...  
just about



## NISSAN ARIYA NISMO

# A cut-price Ioniq 5 N? No

The badge says an ordinary electric crossover is aiming to join a fine tradition of hot Nissans. The badge lies

If you were brought up on *Gran Turismo* in the late '90s and early 2000s, the Nismo badge has an even greater draw than AMG or M. Tales of Mark Blundell's Group C R90CK having its wastegates stick open at Le Mans, facilitating a still-unbeaten post-chicane top speed of 226mph on the Mulsanne straight, only fanned the flames of my admiration.

Then there were the road cars. A few homologation specials sneaked out over the years, but it was Nismo's efforts on the R33-based 400R and R34 Nismo Z-Tune that really grabbed me. Many years later, driving an R35 GT-R Nismo had me hooked.

But times change, and I find myself driving an electric crossover wearing the hal-lowed Nismo badge. It's not the first time it's graced something so upright – there was the first-generation Juke – but it is Nismo's first roadgoing EV.

Nissan is encouraging us to manage our expectations. Don't think of it as a rival to the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N or Kia EV6 GT, but instead it's going after sportier versions of the regular Ioniq 5 and EV6.

There are a few cosmetic add-ons, including copious amounts of Nismo badging, but also some notable changes to the hardware and the software.

Both front and rear electric motors are essentially the same as those in the lesser Ariya E-4orce, but with the wick turned up. The motors output the same amount, yet Nismo mode has a programmed-in 40/60 front/rear torque bias. Power increases to a hefty 429bhp, with torque at 443lb ft for 0-62mph in 5.0 seconds flat.

Front and rear spring and damper rates go up by a modest amount, more so on the rear, and the front anti-roll bar is beefier. The unique 20-inch wheels made by Enkei use a special casting process to increase stiffness to near the level of a pricier forged wheel. These are wrapped in Michelin Pilot Sport EV tyres that boost grip and response.

No sporting flagship would be complete ►



## THE FIRST HOUR

## 2 minutes

No, it doesn't look any better in the metal

## 6 minutes

My eyes tell me the road is smooth, but the Ariya is still finding bumps

## 13 minutes

The power gauge slowly creeps up to 100 per cent. This is not very Nismo

## 29 minutes

I've been fiddling with the seat controls and can't find a totally comfortable driving position

## 43 minutes

Some hairpins let me play with the settings, none of which seems to unleash the fun

## PLUS

Quick; reassuring brake pedal; neat wheels

## MINUS

Range; ride quality; charging speed; just not that much fun



Okay car  
becomes a  
slightly firmer  
okay car



New wheels  
and grippier  
tyres especially  
for the Nismo





Roomy and well equipped like all Ariyas, but with different seat fabric

## There's a constant fidget even on roads that look smooth, and it's very sudden as it nears the limits of the suspension travel

without some sort of bodykit, and the Ariya certainly tries hard here. UK cars are all going to be Stealth Grey – a Nismo-only colour – with the lower part of the body now black with red pinstriping. The aero reduces lift by 40 per cent with no increase in drag.

So there's been a serious attempt at providing a different driving experience. It's enough to make me think some fun might be had on the twisty mountain roads ahead of me. But first, the autoroute. A cushioned ride is not something you'll get from a regular Ariya, and the Nismo is slightly worse. There's a constant fidget even on roads that look perfectly smooth, and it's very sudden as it nears the limits of the suspension travel. Potholes have me wincing.

Feel from the brake pedal is good, with no obvious transition between regen and friction anchors and an easy predictability. VW and Mercedes take note. The brakes aren't physically bigger than on other Ariyas, but the electronics have been tweaked.

It's also pleasant enough to steer, with good weight and response, if no feel, while the autonomous driving tech can take the strain if you prefer.

A tollbooth pause gives me the opportunity to sample the acceleration from a standstill. You need to engage Nismo mode

to access all the power, although it doesn't come at you in a great rush. Stamping on the go pedal elicits a gradual increase in power, the digital dial not hitting 100 per cent until I'm approaching top speed.

The gradual feed-in means traction is rarely an issue, and there's enough shove when you're rolling that it feels capable of the promised numbers.

A deserted series of hairpins is the perfect place to test the new torque bias. There's still a reasonable bit of bodyroll as you turn in, making the standard Ariya seats (here with new black suede centres) seem not really supportive enough as you explore the dynamic potential. It's bad enough for the driver, and it gives the passenger's core strength a real workout.



When you're pushing hard, you can just about feel the front tyres starting to give up before the stability control kicks in. I go into the settings to see what happens when I adjust the ESC to a more sporting setting. There's no ESC Sport mode, so I opt to switch it off completely.

Now it clumsily spins up the inside front or rear tyre for a moment before the ESC wakes up and over-rides the settings, and then it understeers even earlier. The best rivals can be steered enjoyably on the throttle to a degree, unlike the Nissan.

And bear in mind I'm still talking about those not-so-hot hatches as being this car's rivals, rather than the likes of the full-on Ioniq 5 N. Most cars based on the VW Group's MEB underpinnings, or Hyundai's E-GMP, will play ball when you ask them to. That said, they have a much bigger rear bias to the torque split than the Ariya.

It doesn't take long before there's the smell of brakes in the cabin, signalling that I should calm it down. Although the Ariya Nismo is certainly faster than the regular E-4orce, whether the road is straight or bendy, it's just not as entertaining as its immediate rivals. And nor is it anything special as a family car; there's ample room in the cabin for four six-footers, but the boot is small for the class.

Crucially, range takes a hit over the non-Nismo E-4orce Ariya, dropping to 261 miles from 319. The stickier, higher-rolling-resistance tyres take much of the blame here. I averaged around 2.5 miles per kWh driving on a mix of roads with some enthusiastic periods, enough for a calculated range of 217 miles. I'd wager that'd drop to less than 200 miles in the dead of winter.

I would say it's the Juke Nismo all over again, a car I remember for its hilarious torque steer in greasy conditions, yet at least that had a limited-slip diff and uprated brakes to go with its boost in power and fettled suspension. Even if you've lowered your expectations, and if you're happy with the price (not quite £2000 more than a regular Ariya), it's hard to see why you would bother.

ALAN TAYLOR-JONES

### First verdict

Chassis changes worsen the ride and knacker the range, but don't make the Ariya as engaging as it needs to be

★★★★★

| Data | PRICE   | POWERTRAIN                                              | PERFORMANCE                              | WEIGHT | EFFICIENCY                               | ON SALE |
|------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------------|---------|
|      | £56,620 | 87kWh battery, two e-motors, automatic, all-wheel drive | 429bhp, 443lb ft, 5.0sec 0-62mph, 124mph | 2188kg | 2.6 miles per kWh, 261-mile range, 0g/km | Spring  |



**Like the rest of the car, the interior is dull but packs in some neat features**

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There's definitely something there. A car? Nah...



BYD ATTO 2

# Full of surprises

Could it look any duller? But don't be fooled – there's a lot to like here

BYD calls its Shenzhen design hub the Black Crystal, which sounds tremendously exciting, but the Atto 2 is more of a Green Blob. When the only noteworthy bit of design is a fake 'knot' effect in the rear lights, you know it's not a classic. Darting through Madrid, we weren't exactly turning heads.

But on this mundane canvas BYD's engineers have sprinkled some unlikely magic. The Atto 2 sits on BYD's e-Platform 3.0, which uses lithium-ion phosphate (LFP) batteries and comes with a heat pump as standard – worth around 10 to 20 per cent more range in the winter months.

The car we drove used a 45.12kWh battery paired to a motor on the front axle. That means 147bhp, 214ft lb, 0-62mph in 7.9sec and a top speed of 99mph. In the UK we're getting the same motor and a larger 50kWh battery as standard. Performance figures will stay the same, but it'll go for longer than the 194 miles of this European version.

Charging speed isn't good, though. Getting from 10 to 80 per cent battery capacity takes 37 minutes.

So the Atto 2 has baked-in safety and range benefits, and the e-Platform 3.0's high level of rigidity brings benefits for the driver. You can feel the impact around town: the Atto 2 is taut without being stiff, feeling poised while soaking up much of the drains and cracks in central Madrid.

It's nippy, with enough punch to make weaving through city traffic easy. Acceleration is equally positive on the motorway, with the Atto 2 never feeling breathless on higher-speed roads.

On twistier routes above the capital, the steering is precise and well weighted. It's keen to stay centred, which gives it a sporty feel, but it gets lighter the more lock you feed in. The result? The Atto 2 isn't nervous at higher speeds but is easy to fling around in tighter spaces.

The brakes bring another welcome surprise: BYD's engineers have nailed the transition from motor regeneration to friction



The visually interesting bit. Enjoy

brakes, and the result is a left pedal that is both predictable and easy to modulate. The response is linear throughout and it benefits you in town, but also in more spirited driving. Too often we drive EVs with a discombobulating brake pedal – but not this.

Like the rest of the car, the interior of the Atto 2 is dull on the surface but packs in some neat features. There's a 12.8-inch touchscreen in the middle for infotainment, while the driver gets their own 8.8-inch cockpit display. Both are sharp, quick and offer considerable personalisation so it's possible to quickly assemble your own shortcuts. And you'll want to, given the Atto 2's overzealous array of bings, bops and beeps as standard.

The Atto 2 also gets multi-touch gesture control, just like you might find on an Apple MacBook. This adjusts the air-con and is incredibly simple to use; swipe three fingers up to change the temperature and three across to adjust the fan speed. It worked consistently for us and feels like a real innovation in the post-button world manufacturers are forcing us into.

CURTIS MOLDRICH

## First verdict

Doesn't look like much, but performs well. Pity about the tardy charging speed and the near-invisible styling

★★★★★



### THE FIRST HOUR

**3 minutes**  
Touchscreens aside, the interior is a timewarp

**10 minutes**  
Spritely and easy around town

**15 minutes**  
Refined and oddly powerful on the motorway

**20 minutes**  
Brakes put some performance EVs to shame

**35 minutes**  
Multi-touch screen tech actually works! Can you believe it?

### PLUS

Lots of standard kit; innovative infotainment; enjoyable to drive

### MINUS

Boring looks; not cheap; slow charging

|      | PRICE         | POWERTRAIN                                   | PERFORMANCE                          | WEIGHT | EFFICIENCY                                               | ON SALE |
|------|---------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Data | £27,000 (est) | 45.12kWh battery, e-motor, front-wheel drive | 174bhp, 214lb, 7.9sec 0-62mph, 99mph | 1570kg | 3.3 miles per kWh (est), 200-mile range (est), 0g/km CO2 | Summer  |



**In mid- to high-speed corners the extra aero works its magic and is a clear upgrade from the standard MC20**

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Very happy  
on the track,  
but ace on  
the road too



## MASERATI GT2 STRADALE

## Faster la vista

Track-focused reboot is in effect an MC20 Mk2

As much as we like the Maserati MC20, there was always more to come. A mid-engined supercar with a carbon tub and 3.0-litre twin-turbo V6, it's much like the first *Terminator* movie. Excellent, but with room to flesh things out a bit and deliver a breathtaking sequel that takes all the basic ingredients and turns them up to 11.

Introducing, then, the GT2 Stradale. Named after the racing car that claimed numerous class wins in the Fanatec GT2 European Series, the Stradale is limited to 914 units (1 of 914 spells out the birth year of Maserati) and will cost from £273,510. That's punchy pricing considering a similarly carbon-tubbed McLaren 750S is around £30k cheaper and, judged on paper, the GT2 has only modest improvements over the MC20.

Power is up 10bhp to 631bhp while weight drops by 60kg. Forged titanium wheels and new, lighter bucket seats contribute to the track-focused diet. That 631bhp is marshalled by an additional wave of downforce: at 174mph, the MC20 generates 145kg of downward pressure; the GT2 Stradale ups this to 500kg. For context, the Ferrari 296 GTB generates up to 360kg at 155mph, while the Porsche 911 GT3 RS produces 860kg at 177mph, so the Maserati is in between.

The extra pressure is generated by GT2 racecar-inspired elements, including a redesigned front clamshell with beefed-up splitter, a much larger rear diffuser and a carbon rear wing large enough to double up as a surfboard should the need arise. Weighing just 7kg, the wing is manually adjustable through three downforce settings, the highest delivering an aero balance of 130/370kg front to rear.

It's not all about raw, one-lap pace, though. Many of the carbon elements that punctuate the GT2 Stradale's sleek, tightly-proportioned form are required for cooling. At the front there are new brake ducts and louvres on the wheelarches, while the entire rear three-quarter has been redesigned to incorporate larger air intakes that increase the flow of cold air by 16 per cent.

In the warm winter sun of our test route in southern Spain the GT2 Stradale looks the business. If there's one criticism about ►



## THE FIRST HOUR

## 2 minutes

Beautiful shape of an MC20 but with added carbon details

## 9 minutes

Shift lights integrated into the top of the steering wheel. Engine is so flexible they rarely light up

## 23 minutes

It's a tiny bit louder and firmer, but it handles everyday driving like a dream

## 48 minutes

Briefly joined by a 911 GT3 RS. I suspect the Porsche remains the benchmark track special

## 60 minutes

Still can't shake the feeling this is still a road car at heart. It's a damn good one, mind

## PLUS

Quicker around a track; still brilliantly usable

## MINUS

Feels heavier than it is; maybe a touch tame for the price



GT2 Stradale  
differs most  
from the MC20  
in its aero and  
cooling ducts



Forged wheels  
contribute to  
60kg reduction  
in weight





Alcantara reduces reflections; yellow is from the race version

## For a track special, it's hardly compromised on road, but the flip side is that the on-track experience is a little tame

the MC20's looks, it's that – for a supercar – it's too plain, with not enough detail on its smooth lines. No longer.

Changes to the interior are subtle, but important. There's far more liberal use of alcantara over the surfaces to reduce reflections while driving, plus the central tunnel has been completely redesigned and saves around 1.5kg versus the MC20. The drive mode dial has been moved 50mm closer to the driver, while yellow highlights (an idea taken from the racing car) draw attention to the central carbon panel it sits on.

The optional carbonfibre-shelled seats, designed with Sabelt and available in two sizes with three- or four-point harnesses, are finished in bold Blue Elettrico alcantara. They look super aggressive, yet the comfort level is impressive. In fact, given that this is supposed to be a more track-focused version of the MC20, the overall usability remains exceptional. Although the GT2 Stradale borrows its geometry from the racing car, the suspension hardware is largely untouched aside from spring rates that are around 10 per cent stiffer.

Silky Spanish test routes are designed to flatter cars, yet it's clear after just a few miles that Maserati hasn't discarded the MC20's ease of use. The engine feels pretty much

identical. Massive reserves of torque from the midrange mean gearchanges from the eight-speed DCT 'box feel largely optional, while that gravelly, whistling soundtrack remains. A louder titanium exhaust is on the way (for track use), but for the moment any increase in volume is largely down to the removal of the carpets.

The ride comfort is fantastic – slightly firmer than the MC20, but probably the best we've experienced from a track-focused supercar. That means the very occasional bumps and lumps of the mountain roads fail to fluster the GT2 Stradale, with each imperfection gently yet precisely transmitted through the electric power steering system. Despite its billing, this is a lovely car to drive on-road at 7/10ths.



It's not until we roll into the confines of the Ascari circuit (a private playground for those with cars too wild for the road yet too valuable to race) that the GT2 Stradale's positioning properly clarifies. In the mid- to high-speed corners the extra aero works its magic and is a clear upgrade from the MC20, yet in the slower sections there's still the effortless approachability that makes the standard car so easy to drive fast.

It's mid-engined, so you need to trail it in and get the minimum speed down ready to feed in the power as soon as possible and use that wide-reaching torque. Rather than feel edgy or overly keen to rotate, the balance is still very much front-limited and that, together with the feelsome steering, means you know exactly where you stand when driving close to the limit. Mind you, it does feel heavier than its claimed 1365kg dry weight, with the response to inputs sometimes slightly dulled.

An optional new drive mode, Corsa Evo, allows you to turn down the various driving aids (including ABS), but it was locked into its safest setting (4) during our track session. A shame, as the lesser-aided modes may have helped address our primary criticism of the GT2 Stradale.

For a track special it's hardly compromised on road, the flipside of which is that the on-track experience – where a car like this should really shine – is a little tame. In the past, Italian track specials have often been on a knife edge, daring you to flirt with their limits and then – should you survive your dance with the devil – delivering a thrill like no other.

The GT2 Stradale, on the other hand, plays it safe. It's an MC20 Mk2 where almost everything is a little better. Yet, for a track car, it's still something you manage around a circuit rather than helm with wild abandon, palms sweating and heart racing. Of course, there's much to be said for how quickly you can acclimatise to its limits, but whereas other track specials unveil their talents layer-by-layer, the GT2 Stradale hands you everything a little too readily.

**JAMES DENNISON**

### First verdict

A Maserati MC20 Mk2 in all but name – better in just about every way than the original, but still lacking a truly wild side

★★★★★

| Data | PRICE         | POWERTRAIN                                                 | PERFORMANCE                                                  | WEIGHT       | EFFICIENCY           | ON SALE                   |
|------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
|      | From £273,510 | 2992cc 24v twin-turbo V6, eight-speed DCT auto, rear-drive | 631bhp @ 7500rpm, 531lb ft @ 3000rpm, 2.8sec 0-62mph, 201mph | 1365kg (dry) | 24.4mpg, 265g/km CO2 | Now (limited to 914 cars) |



# Opinion

**SENSIBLE AUDIS + SUPER SUPERMINIS + ALFA vs DODGE**

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## Letter of the month

### Happy shopper

Your six months of glowing Our Cars reviews of the Renault Clio persuaded me to add it to my shortlist for a second car. After a test drive I bought

a TCe 90 in Esprit Alpine trim.

It's a cracking little car, zesty with an eagerness that belies its modest power output. It's got all the features you could wish for, with heated seats and Apple CarPlay, plus physical controls for ventilation and switching off the bings and bongs.

While not strictly necessary, the Alpine spec lifts the looks and it's had a few admiring glances from people who think it's a hot version.

It's 20 years since we last owned a Clio, and the cars we've owned since have been bigger and bigger. It's so refreshing to get back in a small, well sorted, peppy car with just the things you need.

Thanks to CAR for covering the whole automotive spectrum and recommending a car that really puts a

**Hey Ford: this could be you**

smile on your face whatever the journey.

**James Statham**

**It's fabulous, isn't it? Ford must surely be regretting dropping the Fiesta, which could still be soaking up some of this love. CO**

### Normal service is resumed

I'm not sure how deliberate it was on your part to follow a story about Audi's business troubles with a review of the new electric A6 (300-Mile Test, February). In both, the message was clear: Audi's forays into more extreme design, high performance and steep pricing are distracting it from the core job, at which it remains pretty good.

Hard to imagine falling in love with an A6 e-Tron, but easy to imagine living with it every day, trusting it to look after my family, get me to work and back in a completely fuss-free way, while also being pretty decent to drive.

As the former owner of a couple of A4s and an A6 (back when they had engines), what I like most about Audi is its timeless design, user-friendly technology, comfort and quality. Whereas the idea of a replacement TT or R8 leaves me cold, and the

whole Dakar project (successful, yes, but so what?) seems like it was out to make some sort of point, at doubtless great cost.

But if Audi can stifle its internal yawns and just keep on evolving those saloons and estates, everyone's happy.

**Gary Ward**

### Burden of taxation

The new M5 has a kerbweight of 2435kg – 540kg up on the last model, a 22 per cent increase, done in the name of becoming greener by going hybrid. As you point out in your Giant Test (January issue), it can save some UK user-choosers thousands on tax, and in some European countries it costs less than the (considerably lighter) M3, because of the impact of emissions on price.

And think how many brake pads and tyres (those famously environmentally-friendly and easy-to-recycle items) a 2.4-tonne M5 will get through.

**Scott Chesney**

### Right then, right now

Growing up abroad in the 1980s, my father had a Mercedes S-Class W126, as featured in Georg Kacher's piece in the January issue. Dad also owned



**30 seconds later, that wall crashes down**







the previous W116, which had fantastic presence with its double-chrome front bumpers, but the W126 was just an amazing step forward.

Then on a visit to the UK I bought my first copy of CAR and there it was reviewed in the back in the GBU section: 'The best car in the world.'

That was my first experience of a piece of automotive journalism articulating how I felt. Just wonderful that even today Georg agrees the W126 is still all the prestige saloon car you really ever need.

**Nick Moffett**

## Get the right version

I drive a Polestar 4 so I was interested in your February comparison test with the Porsche Macan Electric and BMW i5. The Polestar was ranked third. Your criticisms were mainly focused on the crashy ride and handling. You need the Single Motor Long Range with standard 20-inch Aero wheels – wafts around swallowing bumps and is still really composed, with very little bodyroll.

Even coming from a 400bhp Polestar 2 Twin Motor, I'm a very happy camper. Only £60k to boot, with *that* interior and modern styling.

**Ian Beard**

## Foxtrot Alfa

An interesting interview with outgoing Alfa CEO and new Stellantis Europe head Jean-Phillippe Imparato (New Cars 2025, February issue). His

**Like a Dodge Hornet, but Alfa-ier**

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views seem to be as Europe-centric as those of his neglectful former boss Tavares, who let the US region get into a mess with declining sales, over-optimistic pricing and a massive backlog of inventory. It cost him his job. In Europe Alfa may be improving but here in the USA it's still really struggling.

Over here the Tonale has not been a success. A badge-engineered version called the Dodge Hornet is also sold here, undercutting the Tonale and generally confusing and tarnishing the offer. Not that this has led to success in the Dodge showrooms, where it sits next to Challengers and Chargers. The Tonale is sold only as the top-spec PHEV, pricing it above the Stelvio.

The other issue peculiar to the US is the dealers. There are some whole states in the US with none, and even in major metro areas travelling 30 miles to one is not unusual.

In comparison, Hyundai's Genesis brand has arrived, and from zero rapidly and completely eclipsed Alfa.

While it's less than ideal, Genesis sells out of Hyundai showrooms, and even more importantly is serviced there at Hyundai rates. Better a comprehensive but shared network than too few dedicated 'premium' franchises. Stellantis could do the same here, having every Jeep dealer also support Alfa. One for Mr Imparato's successor to ponder.

**Bevan Brookfield**

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# ‘Drive a new electric Renault 5 and you certainly don’t miss the original’s four-pot motor’

I have happy memories of the old Renault 5. The new electric 5 may have as much in common with it technically as a virtual-reality headset does with a beret. But here was a car I really wanted to drive, and maybe even buy.

Nostalgia played a part. I fondly remember thrashing a basic-spec R5 around the Nürburgring, back in the days when you turned up, paid a few D-marks and were let loose.

It rolled and pitched like a small boat in a swell. But I swear I’ve never had so much fun at the ‘Ring. It provided a lifelong lesson: speed is irrelevant to driving enjoyment. (One reason I dislike most hypercars: all figures and no feel.)

Later, I raced a Renault 5 GT Turbo in a frenzied one-make series. Soon after, we bought a Clio, the 5 follow-up.

More important than the beret-and-baguette nostalgia is the way the new electric 5 looks. It has all the old 5’s charm and many of its cues. But it looks as cutting-edge modern as the latest iMac.

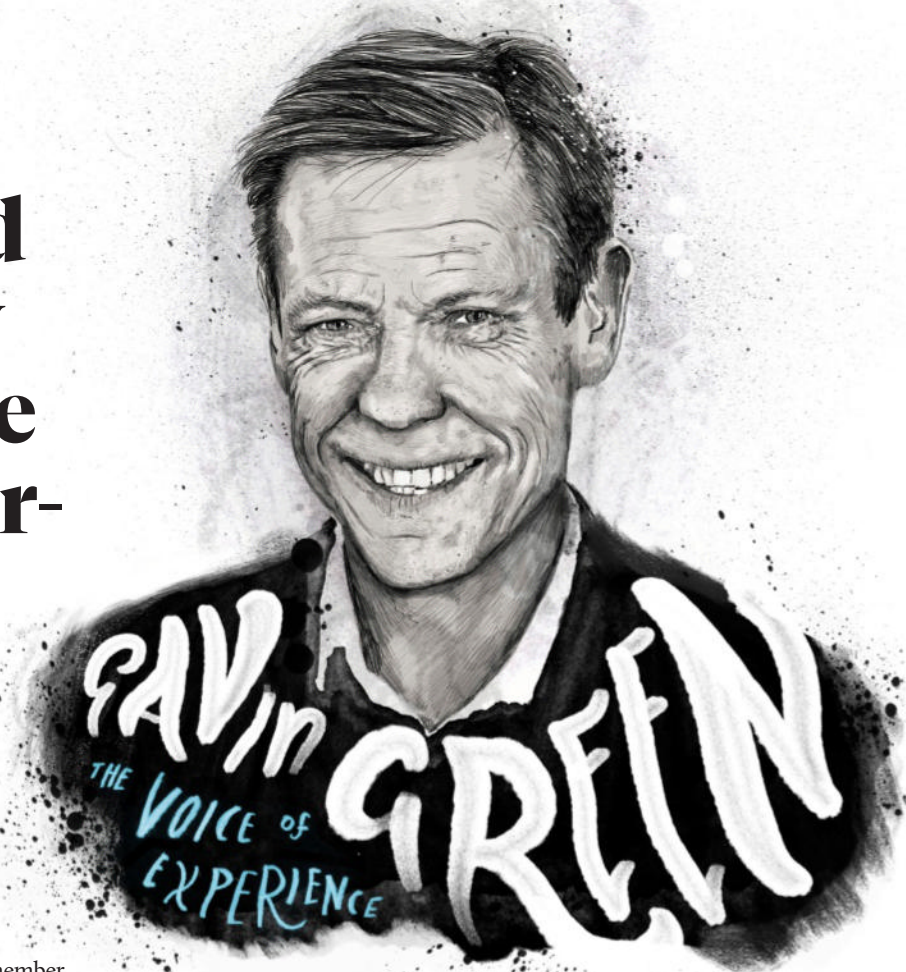
So just after New Year, a bright Pop Green 5 E-Tech turned up in my drive. It created much interest, not just from grey-hairs keen to reminisce about old Renault 5s, and not just because of its arresting pea-green paintjob.

Even before it went on sale in the UK, it was big news. That’s the advantage of a famous name. The UK media normally reacts to the launch of a new Renault with a shrug of Gallic indifference.

It’s the same EV nostalgia card played by the Mini three-door hatch, the Fiat 500e, the VW Buzz, and – far less convincingly – the Ford Mustang, Explorer and Capri (badges of convenience, not conviction). And now there’s the new Grande Panda, and soon a re-vamped Renault 4.

The R5, along with the Mini, 500, Panda and R4, is an everlasting design, functional, practical, pretty and classless, and likely to be equally appealing to men and women. They’re all perfect starting points for modern reboots.

They work well as EVs too. Drive a new 5 and you certainly don’t miss the old four-pot motor. That’s part of the problem with the re-vamped Mustang. The old car’s major appeal was its *Days of Thunder* V8 soundtrack.



I asked my friend Frank Stephenson about the appeal of nostalgia. Frank, as you may know, was responsible for the design of the 2001 BMW Mini and the 2007 Fiat 500, probably the two most successful small European cars of the past 25 years, and both 21C reboots of much-loved old tots.

‘There’s comfort in nostalgia,’ he told me. ‘You supposedly go back to better times. Also, you must remember what made the Mini and 500 successful in the first place. That was partly their design simplicity. And simple designs are more timeless designs.’

The new R5 is another example of how EVs can be highly desirable, and how they’ve made cars interesting again. It’s also worth remembering that Renault is rather good at EVs. It’s been doing it longer than any other Euro maker: the Zoe was Europe’s first modern-era mass-market EV, launched the same year as the Tesla Model S (2012).

The electric 5 is also terrific value. It’s similar money (from £22,995) to the cheaper Chinese offerings, and way more appealing.

Fighting Chinese value with Euro nostalgia is a clever strategy, and China cannot respond in the same way: nobody wants to buy a reborn version of the 1959 Hongqi CA72.

However, the Chinese car makers can play the nostalgia card in a different way, by buying history. Take MG. The new and impressive Cyberster is a reborn MG TF/MGB roadster, with some of the proceeds going to the Chinese state.

The Chinese also control Lotus and Volvo, and own the rights to Austin, Morris and Wolseley – all part of old MG Rover. We will surely see a reborn electric Elan, and long ago there was talk of a revised Morris Minor.

An Austin Allegro E, though, may be a step too far.

Former *CAR* editor Gavin Green is a commentator on automotive matters, with French superminis among his many specialist subjects



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# ‘Can’t we just give motorsport a free pass and let them burn petrol? Surely there are bigger fish to fry’

**R**ecently I was in Venice and saw how this great medieval city is sinking into the mud. The beautiful Ca’ D’Oro – an ornate palazzo overlooking the Grand Canal – is now 70cm lower than it was when it was built in 1437. Crazy to think that Venetian noblemen used to arrive at the palace in their private

gondolas and step up onto a grand stone staircase; now, the front door at the top of the steps is lapped by waves. Depressing. Literally.

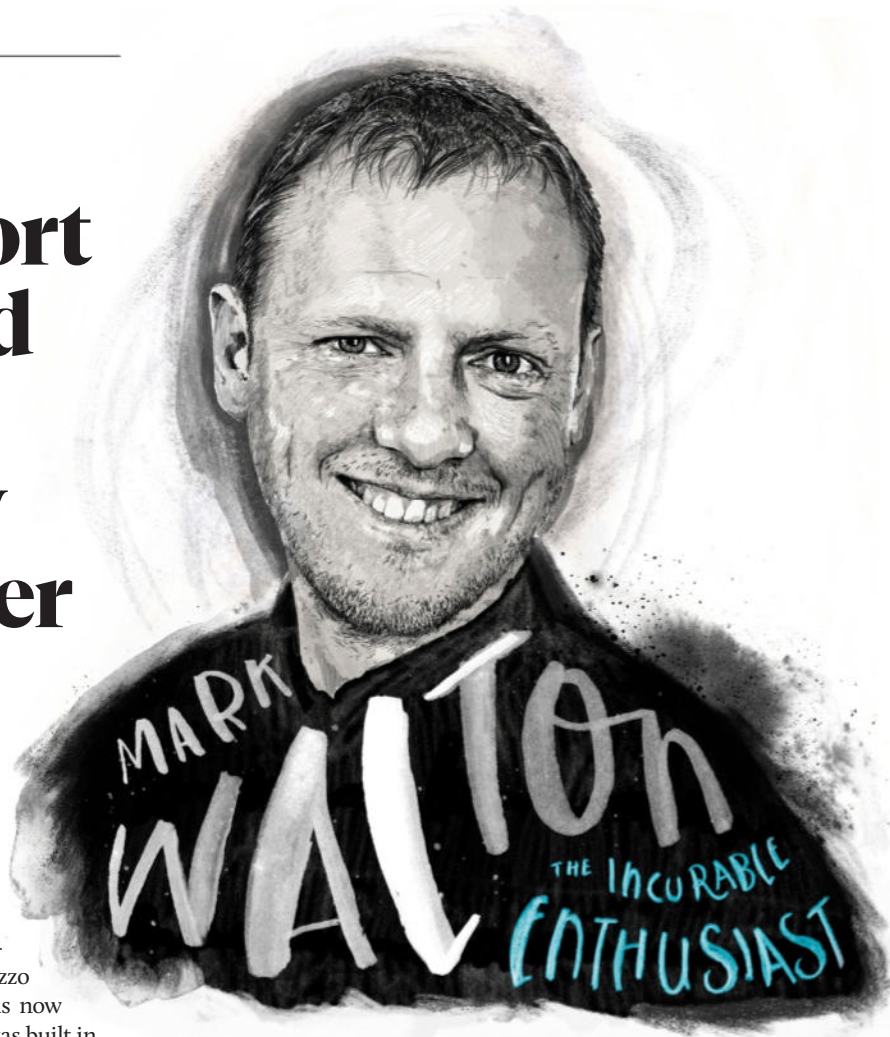
Anyway, then I came home and learned that Warwick University has developed an LMP3 car that runs on sewage. I have to admit, it all put me into a bit of a funk.

You may be wondering how the two are connected. It’s all linked in my head like some giant BBC arts programme – a grand, 12-part opus on BBC2, presented by Simon Schama or Mary Beard, exploring the rise and fall of Western civilisation with celebrity vox pops from the likes of Gary Lineker and that woman from *Holby City*. So good luck understanding my brief, ranting synopsis...

I’m sure many readers will agree when I say the world feels broken, post-Covid, and there are signs of decline everywhere. In the past, when the world has felt chaotic and out of kilter, motorsport has provided us with a beacon of hope – an arena of human ingenuity and fighting spirit. There’s always been something heroic about the big engines and the big balls, epitomised by the likes of Fangio, Senna or that other great world champion, Steve McQueen.

But now even that swashbuckling bravado is under threat from net zero and the cheesy, razzle-dazzle launch event that Formula 1 put on at the O2. In the past, Britain created the Cosworth DFV, the ground-effect Lotus 79, and Nigel Mansell’s moustache. Now we build a car that runs on poop.

Maybe I’m being a little harsh on the project. The LMP3 car that the University of Warwick has built is really a showcase for another, more significant technology. Back in 2021 there was a study into finding a more energy-efficient way of treating waste water. The focus turned to what are called microbial electrolysis cells. These were already understood – these cells use electroactive bacteria, micro organisms that naturally generate tiny amounts of electricity, to break down organic matter, producing clean water and hydrogen.



Previously, experiments to ramp up the scale of this effect beyond the laboratory bench have been prohibitively expensive because the cells used costly carbon membranes to nurture the microbes. The big breakthrough was made by a British start-up called Wastewater Fuels, which replaced the carbon with a mesh of stainless-steel rods. As the waste water passes through, the microbes colonise the rods and the hydrogen ions they produce then diffuse into the steel. Hydrogen gas is produced in the core of each rod and harvested.

‘From flush to fuel’ they call it – and producing clean, green hydrogen through the bio-treatment of waste water is obviously very, very clever. We should applaud it! It’s so resourceful! So environmentally friendly! (My face is hurting from so much earnest smiling.)

But it’s not exactly a twin-turbo V6, is it? I want my racing cars to be like the space race – gleaming rockets on wheels, tipped with armour-piercing titanium, burning 80,000 litres of liquid oxygen in a white-hot inferno of raw power. Instead, the University of Warwick has developed a car that runs on poop.

And I’m sorry, but some of the details are so tragic. The Warwick team tell us that their Ginetta-based sports racer has some parts that have been ‘adapted with sustainable materials’ including a wing mirror made from beetroot waste.

Argh, please shoot me now. I don’t want to disagree – but can’t we just give motorsport a free pass and let them burn old-fashioned petrol instead? Surely there are bigger fish to fry.

Which made me reflect on those beautiful Venetian palaces on the Grand Canal and the fact that I flew there on an EasyJet plane, along with 10 million other tourists.

All civilisations sink into the mud eventually.

**Editor-at-large Mark Walton, despite this dip into gloom, remains largely optimistic about the chances of having his cake and eating it**

Peter Strain



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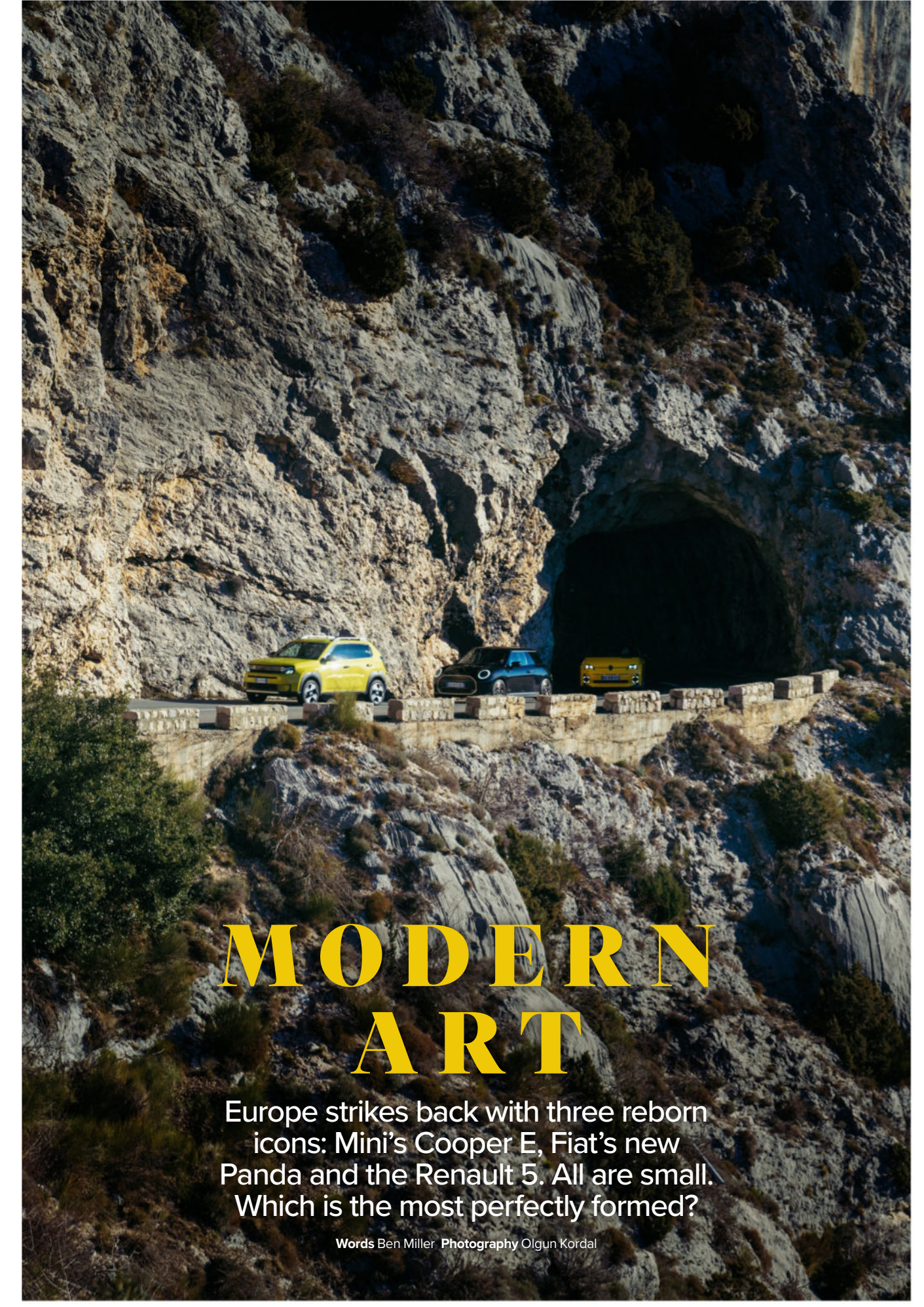
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# OLD MASTERS







# MODERN ART

Europe strikes back with three reborn icons: Mini's Cooper E, Fiat's new Panda and the Renault 5. All are small. Which is the most perfectly formed?

Words Ben Miller Photography Olgun Kordal



Pretty little  
Mini chases  
chunky, funky  
Fiat







hat's in the clang of a door or bootlid? Everything. Like a handshake, it is the single gesture that speaks volumes; the half-second first impression that, like it or not, cannot be undone.

With its push to build hatchbacks with the perceived quality of a premium saloon, Germany in particular poured a lot of years and a lot of money into battling the clang. The door of a new Golf closes with a solid, well-damped thud, as has the door of every Golf since the bank-vault Mk4. Solid and well-damped means expensive, means better, right?

There is another way. The door of a Peugeot 205 GTI or a Lotus Elise closes not with a well-damped thud but with a featherweight clang that speaks to a different set of priorities: of steering feel over solidity; of joy over leaden durability.

These three – Mini's Cooper E, Renault's reborn 5 and the new Fiat Grande Panda – all clang to a greater or lesser extent. Drop the 5's

bootlid and suddenly it's 1990 again, and you just lobbed your squash bag into the boot of your 5 GT Turbo. Slam the Panda's door and it's like going back 40 years; your boxy, Giugiaro-penned workhorse – scraped and dinged and with sun-faded paint – jauntily parked just as close to your favourite Amalfi beach spot as you can get it.

The cheap and fun small car, created in post-war Europe and fundamental to its landscape ever since, is back to do again what it did then: move people for not much cash. Only this time they're electric.

The piston-engined originals were multi-faceted little miracles. Cheap enough to be everywhere and practical enough to do anything, they were engineered with such charm they weren't merely owned; they were loved. They were, like a dog, part of the family. And now a new generation is here, sent to save the EV. For too long overweight, overwrought, expensive and anodyne, the electric car has been waiting – waiting to be re-imagined as something more desirable, more affordable and more light-hearted. Something simple and honest and happy. Something with clang.

The Panda clangs and it is a very, very happy car. It is also very, very keen that you understand it is both a Fiat and a Panda. We find Fiat's '80s five-stripe logo moulded into the black plastic wheelarches, Fiat badges on the wheel centres, 'Panda' stamped into the lower doors and, on the C-pillar, a black square that, depending on where you stand, is either the five-stripe logo again or 'Fiat'. Of accessories Coco Chanel once said, 'Take off the last thing you put on,' and some will suggest the Panda's gone a little far. But not me: creativity, confidence and an infectious sense of fun? It's a dark day indeed when you're asking for less of these things.

Hop inside and the Fiat doesn't let up. Big boxy vents mirror the similarly cubist rear lights, and the twin displays sit in a yellow-tinted plastic lozenge of a dash, shaped after the plan view of the Lingotto factory and complete with a cute little Panda running around its perimeter. On the passenger side, the glovebox – in a bamboo-based ►





Not a crossover.  
But it can pass  
for one

material, obviously; geddit? – sits above a shelf that runs most of the width of the cockpit, and immediately begins to acquire sunglasses, toll tickets and sweet wrappers in the same way an anchored hull attracts barnacles. Perfect.

But this is a seriously well-designed car, as well as a funky one. The tall, boxy proportions give it the roomiest interior and the biggest boot (361 litres) in a footprint barely any bigger than either the short, low-slung Mini's (3.85m long, 210-litre boot) or the Renault's (3.92m long, 277-litre boot). The Fiat also has an integrated charging cable you pull out from behind a flap in the front grille, freeing up the boot and keeping you from getting filthy wrestling a mucky cable in winter (there's still a charge port, for faster charging).

It takes just a couple of hours and a fuss-free Ionity charging stop to leave Turin behind (the official range is 199 miles; reckon on 150), cross into France and watch the temperature rise from single-digit shivering to T-shirt weather. With the Fiat's neat little steering wheel alive in my hands and its 111bhp electric motor silently screaming for the heavens like a homesick angel, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. The windows are down. In billows a breeze warm and perfumed with sea spray and the *terroir* of the Alpes-Maritime. Hundreds of feet below, the Mediterranean shimmers under an unbroken blue sky. The light is, like the people, impossibly rich and beautiful.

High on the engineering miracle that is the dual-carriageway A8, the coastal motorway that mostly runs on towering concrete supports, we sweep through wicked curves and plunge into cool, dark tunnels. Near-vertical cliffs plunge down to arcs of sun-bleached beach. Powerboats like white-tailed comets race out to sea. And among the vans and the aggressive Audis, scarlet Ferrari Romas run at roughly twice the speed limit.

Unlike a Roma, the Fiat is neither fast nor expensive. It'll shuffle 0-62mph in a leisurely 11-ish seconds and top out at just 82mph. But on the road it feels nothing like as slow as those numbers might sug-

## The Fiat's 111bhp motor silently screams for the heavens like a homesick angel, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else

gest, gleefully careening about the place on a weirdly joyous blend of pillowy-soft suspension, smart steering, half-decent body control (carrying a hefty battery down low does wonders for your centre of gravity) and that instant-torque liveliness EVs do so well.

And the Panda is exceptionally inexpensive. The electric version (in Stellantis style other powertrains, including a hybrid, will follow) starts at £20,975. This flagship La Prima uses the same battery and motor but rewards your £23,975 with bigger, 17-inch wheels and a tonne of kit including heated seats and steering wheel and wireless phone charging. So, the more expensive version of the Grande Panda is more expensive than the least expensive Renault 5. But this Panda's way cheaper than both this 5 (from £22,995, £30,195 as tested) and this Cooper E (from £30,120; £37,420 as tested).

Finally we're off the A8 and down to street level, corkscrewing down a slip road like the Lingotto's endless concrete ramp. The Fiat's a weapon in town. It's bigger than the last Panda (another, smaller Panda will come, hence the Grande qualifier here) but, at 3999mm long and just 1763mm wide (not including mirrors), it is not big. With its quick-witted steering, compact proportions and instant go, the Fiat cuts through these labyrinthine, scooter-infested streets like the native it sort of is. If only switching between drive and reverse was more satisfying and more clear-cut (too often you're still in D when you want R, or you've strayed into the purgatory of neutral) and the ►



# THE GENIUS OF GIUGIARO'S PANDA

## SPACE TO BURN

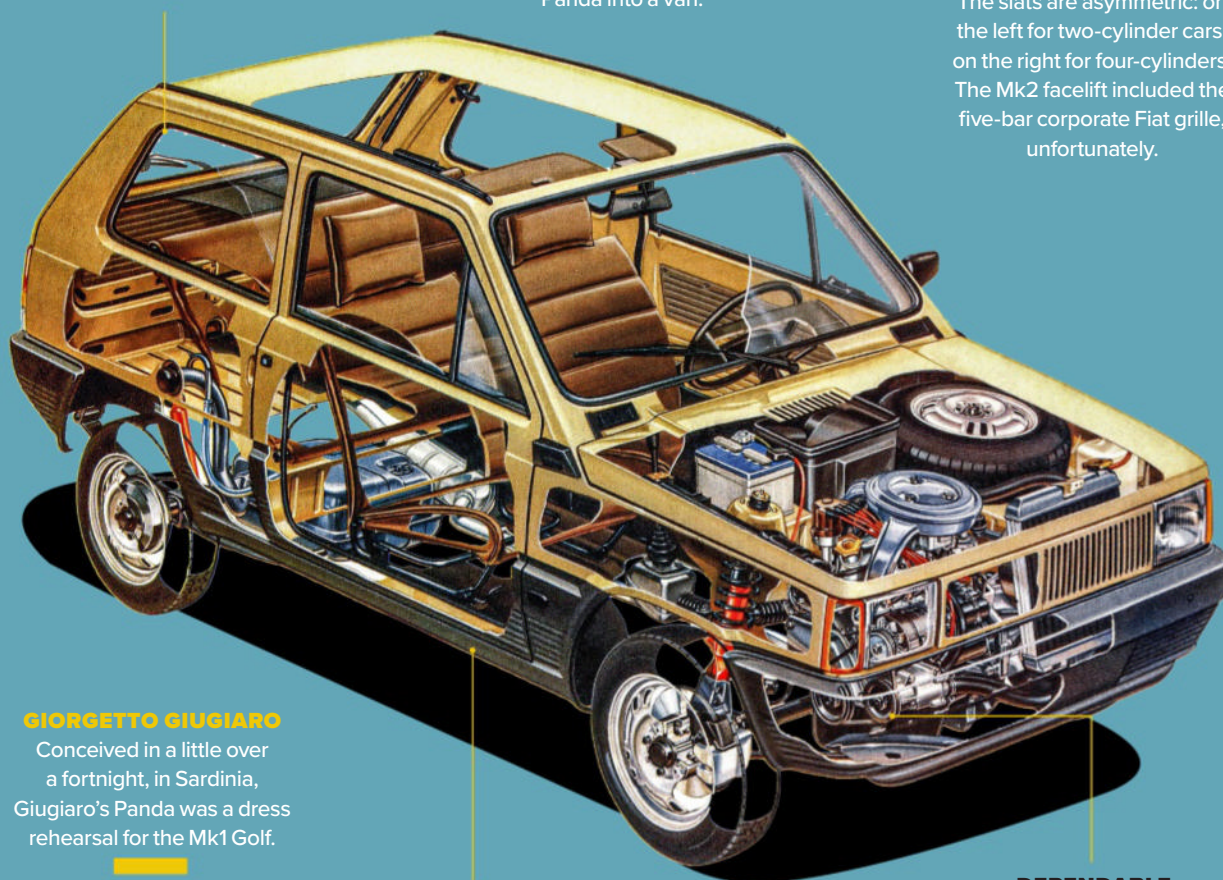
The Panda was astonishingly roomy for such a small car, and that includes boot space. The cargo area was designed to accommodate two 50-litre demijohns of wine, with a full complement of passengers on board. With the rear seats removed, the cargo area is a massive 1000 litres.

## EASY-CLEAN

The interior is a masterclass in versatility. The fabric seat, dash and door covers can be removed and washed. The configurability is astonishing: the folding seats can even turn into a double bed, should the Premier Inn be full... Rear seats can also be easily removed to turn the Panda into a van.

## FUNCTIONAL

Rather than a decorative grille – heavier, pricier, less pure – the Panda simply has slats in the front sheet metal. The slats are asymmetric: on the left for two-cylinder cars, on the right for four-cylinders. The Mk2 facelift included the five-bar corporate Fiat grille, unfortunately.



## GIORGETTO GIUGIARO

Conceived in a little over a fortnight, in Sardinia, Giugiaro's Panda was a dress rehearsal for the Mk1 Golf.



## MOSTLY FLAT

To make it cheap to manufacture and to repair, the body panels are (mostly) flat and so is the glass. This also saves weight. The result is a box on wheels – that also looks great. Its square shape, flat floor and high roof also help spaciousness.

## DEPENDABLE

There were two engines initially: a 652cc twin borrowed from the 126, and a 903cc four from the 127. They were mechanically simple, frugal and tuneful. The new four-cylinder FIRE engines that appeared with the Mk2 significantly boosted performance and refinement.



# THE GENIUS OF THE FIRST-GEN 5

## AU CONTRAIRE

Where the Mini had proved transverse engines made for amazingly compact packaging, the 5 – like the 4 before it – mounted its stubby little engines longitudinally, with the gearbox out front: great for weight distribution, a headache for the poor folks designing the shift linkage.

## COMFY AND FUN

Little about the 5's mechanical layout would suggest it should be a giggle to drive. But the twist-'n'-pull gearlever was tight and precise and the torsion-bar suspension made it comfy, roll-tastic and huge fun to hustle.

## AHEAD OF ITS TIME

Unveiled in 1971 and built from '72 onwards, the first-gen 5 was ahead of its time, almost single-handedly popularising the supermini concept. The chic 5 arrived ahead of VW's Polo, the subsequently ubiquitous Ford Fiesta and Honda's fuel-sipping Civic.



## MICHEL BOUÉ

Initiative played a big part in the 5 story, with stylist Boué perfecting his ground-breaking design out of hours.

## FOR ALL SEASONS

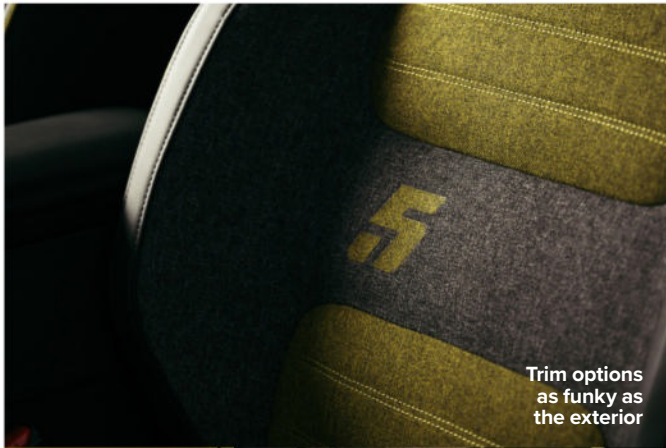
The concept of the versatile, affordable and fun-to-drive 5 is credited to Renault's Bernard Hanon, who figured a funkier, younger version of the bum-basic 4L might do well. Designer Michel Boué created the simple but super-chic two-box design.

## BRAVELY TWO-DOOR

Renault stuck to its guns on the three-door hatchback layout for launch, despite the popularity of four-doors in France. And it paid back in spades. The 5 was a sales hit for a decade, and the three-door look, clean surfaces and wraparound bumpers gave it a chic minimalism.







Trim options as funky as the exterior



5's cockpit works beautifully



La Prima's bigger wheels are pure retro



This one's electric. But there'll be a hybrid too



This isn't a hot hatch. But it is fun



Coming at you with a gallon of ground clearance



## The Panda is a delight to punt along; utterly charming and nostalgic in its back-to-basics simplicity

range indicator were a little less unhelpfully optimistic. After one top-up the dash shows 191 miles of range on a 100 per cent charge, but 89 miles later we're showing 62 miles, 40 having vanished.

Climbing out of the city into the mountains, chasing the 5's perfectly formed rear as it, in turn, chases a hard-charging Cooper E, the Panda refuses to feel out of its depth. Surprisingly so, as fellow tester Seth Walton points out: 'I had worried the driving experience would be a letdown, given how much time and effort has clearly gone into the design. But the Panda's good to drive. Yes, it feels down on power in this company – you have to work it hard to keep up – but it's composed, the steering's decent and it's sharper on turn-in than it has any right to be. It's a lot of fun.'

The D2, which branches off the more famous (and much busier) Route Napoleon, is an astonishing stretch of near-empty tarmac, and the Panda is a delight to punt along it; charming, innocent somehow and nostalgic in its back-to-basics simplicity. It doesn't take anything too seriously and it is not in a hurry. The Cooper E? Well, that does take things seriously and it is in a hurry.

Minis have always been in their element in the mountains and right here, right now, the Cooper E feels sensational. After the Panda, which isn't a crossover but can, with its boxy body and roof rails, look and feel like one, the Mini feels like a sports car, for better or for worse. Goes like one, too. And it was ever thus, right? In the early '90s there was a very good reason most of my friends, even the 6ft 6in

ones, bought cheap Minis, not Pandas. The Mini and its A-series motor were supported by a massive aftermarket; if you couldn't afford any of it you just drove hard and slightly sideways everywhere.

In the Cooper E you sit in a snug cockpit (the steering wheel now ahead of you rather than between your knees, thankfully) that spoils front-row occupants but considers rear-seat passengers unwanted ballast. Flipping the seat forward is awkward, and legroom and headroom in the back are tight. Whatever. Pull shut the frameless door, twist the ignition and take a moment to ponder this beautifully executed cabin, with its rich ambient lighting, inspired use of fabrics and premium detailing. Then just drive.

Our first dash along this deserted stretch of D2 is experimental, the Mini and I making it up as we go along. And it is mighty: strong brakes (certainly the best here, though still not the last word in fidelity), huge grip, beefy body control, laugh-out-loud agility (direct steering plus no wheelbase equals instant changes of direction) and acceleration that feels like a top-fuel dragster after the Panda (the 181bhp e-motor, powering the front wheels only, will haul you 0-62mph in 7.3sec). When a corner turns out to be tighter than you thought, fear not. Push down the panic, breathe and just add more lock. The Mini will simply turn tighter. Really need to brake hard mid-corner? Be its guest, though it's now that the car's not inconsiderable mass (at 1615kg, it's nearly a passenger heavier than the Grande Panda, despite its very modest battery capacity) does make itself felt.

A U-turn, a few notes on a picnic table with a view no iPhone could ever hope to capture and we're back up to speed, more confident now that we know the road. And now the Mini's on another level entirely. Its level of performance feels both right for the car and right for this kind of road; potent enough to haul past dawdling A-Class Mercs out of uphill hairpins but never so lairy it threatens to get you or the car's chassis into trouble.

So responsive are all the controls that the Cooper E's a device ►



# THE GENIUS OF ISSIGONIS' MINI

## LONG LIVED

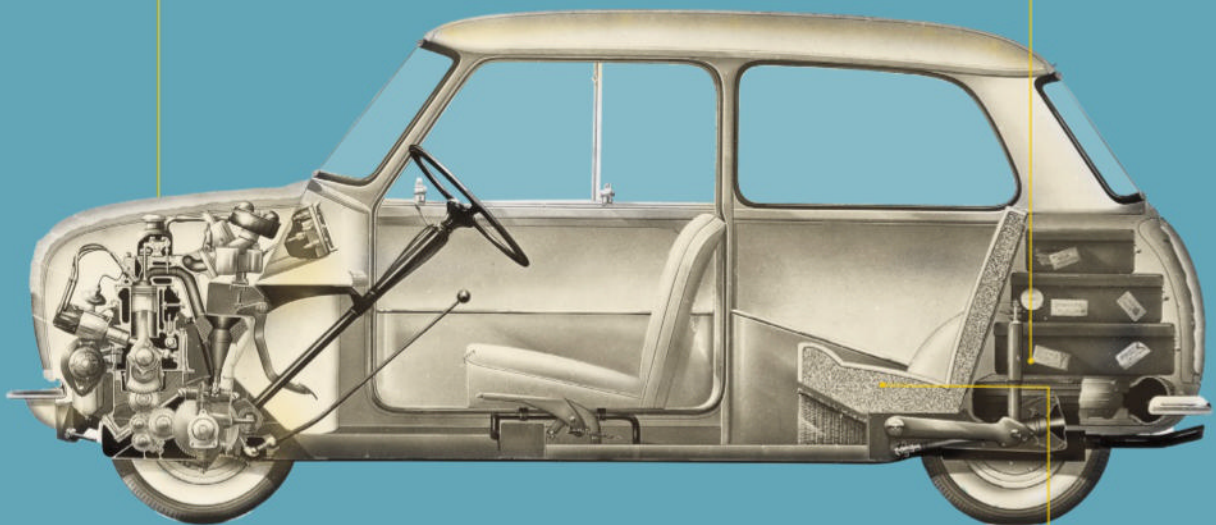
Created in the fuel-starved '50s, and another answer to the same set of questions that prompted the bubble-car boom, the original Mini was in production for most of the second half of the 20th century. Fun, cool and influential, it was a masterpiece.

## TINY WEENY

Packaging a family, an engine and some corned beef into a footprint just three metres long takes some ingenuity, and the original Mini had that in spades. Its genius lay in its union of a monocoque construction and a transverse engine driving the front wheels.

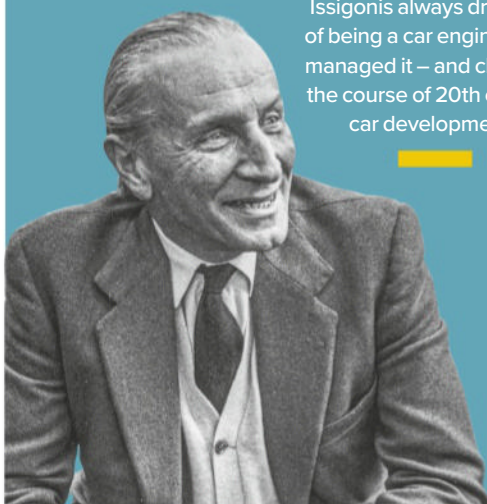
## RUBBER CONES

The Mini's innovative rubber-cone suspension played a role in liberating more space within the tiny body. The cones were more compact than conventional springs and stiffer, too, giving the Mini the lively, pretty honest ride and handling balance beloved of modern Mini still.



## SIR ALEC ISSIGONIS

Born in Turkey, racing-mad Issigonis always dreamed of being a car engineer. He managed it – and changed the course of 20th century car development.



## AN UNLIKELY WINNER

The Mini may have started life as a fuel-sipping and affordable family car but by the mid '60s it was flourishing, both as a style icon and a racing car. Hopkirk's '64 Monte Carlo was the ankle biter's first big win.

## MANY BODIES

You remember the Mini as a hatch but there were a tonne of variants, from timber-clad estates to pick-ups, vans to Mokes. In part this was made possible by the modular architecture. The suspension was built into front and rear subframes, meaning the body could be switched out relatively easily.





Bamboo  
meets  
CarPlay





Rear lights  
a modern  
twist on the  
original's

Retractable  
front charging  
cable lives  
here

Wheels  
are tasty;  
damping's  
even tastier

best driven smoothly, with deliberate, measured inputs. Do so and it's hard to imagine anything being much quicker along here, given the Mini's combination of grip, power and diddy dimensions. No gearchanges to get right or revs to manage either, just a swift and satisfying turn of speed with more than a little adjustability, the Cooper E happily rotating a bunch more whenever you need it to. As with any good hot hatch you feel plugged into its pointy front axle. But where you might expect a nervous, edgy rear in turn, that simply isn't the case. If I lived here, with this car, would I occasionally set an early alarm and drive these roads for the hell of it? You bet I would.

Mid-afternoon and the sun that's dazzled us all day has taken on a more mellow warmth. We've paused at the roadside bar at Escrag-nolles, a spot I've visited many times before in the company of machinery as outlandish as a snotty-tyred GSX-R1000 Suzuki and a sorbet-orange Huracan Performante. But nothing's ever quite attracted the attention of these electric hatches, parked nose to tail at the kerbside. Unlikely though it might sound, what these cars have in spades is – for want of a better word – *swagger*. New Jaguar, which is going all-electric, believes people will buy its new cars because they're hopelessly in love with the way those cars look; the piston-less powertrain will be incidental. Maybe. But you sense that with these three, and particularly the electric-only 5 – a master-crafted Trojan horse for EV adoption by stealth – that's absolutely the case.

That the Renault is good will likely not have escaped you. A five-star car from the moment we drove it, it's now cruising about the place picking up trophies like Pep in his prime. And in this light – right here, right now – we can't stop looking at it. With plenty of that concept-car-made-real magic Audi was so good at with the likes of the Mk1 TT and A2, the 5 looks like a show car with plates; a design study with dead flies on the front. It looks *right*. And bang on cue a blue Alpine A110 howls past, also looking *right*.

Chasing the little blue sports car back down to Cannes, the 5 feels

## We can't stop looking at the 5 in Yellow Pop! – a master-crafted Trojan horse for EV adoption by stealth

great. The steering is arguably the nicest here; direct and slack-free like the Mini's but lighter (you can adjust weight within each drive mode) and more natural somehow. More feel than the Panda's, too. Performance is effortless, and I note the Renault's holding more remaining range up its sleeve than either of the other two after the day's driving. The 5 manages to bring both the lowest kerbweight and the biggest battery (52kWh) to the party, for a 252-mile official range, or 175-185 miles realistically.

The 5 slings itself up to speed and immediately settles into an easy seven-tenths tempo, covering ground quickly and neatly as the four-cylinder Alpine ahead twists and turns. The 5 can stick with a cruising A110, it seems, and it can almost cling to the hard-charging Mini – gently gapping the Panda in the process – but it's less comfortable being driven by the scruff of its neck, preferring a more measured approach. And Renault has an option for chasing Mini Coopers, of course: the Alpine A290. In that context the 5's set-up, for the price point and its remit, feels beautifully judged; agile and entertaining but sophisticated, too, with sweetly-judged damping.

And really, of its myriad strengths, the 5's biggest is one you can't see – the price. A couple of years ago I lost count of the number of interviews, mainly with CEO Luca de Meo and then executive VP for engineering Gilles Le Borgne, in which the room's palpable excitement for the 5 was tempered by the truth that, for all its ambition, pricing would be critical: at £20k-£25k-ish or less it'd fly, soar even. ►



### MINI COOPER E

**PRICE** From £30,120  
(£37,420 as tested)

**POWERTRAIN** 36.6kWh battery,  
e-motor, front-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 181bhp, 214lb ft,  
7.3sec 0-62mph, 99mph

**WEIGHT** 1615kg

**EFFICIENCY** 4.5 miles per kWh,  
185-mile range, 0g/km CO2

**ON SALE** Now

★★★★☆

### RENAULT 5 E-TECH

**PRICE** From £22,995 (£30,195 as tested)

**POWERTRAIN** 52kWh battery, e-motor,  
front-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 148bhp, 181lb ft,  
8.0sec 0-62mph, 93mph

**WEIGHT** 1450kg

**EFFICIENCY** 3.85 miles per kWh,  
252-mile range, 0g/km CO2

**ON SALE** Now

★★★★★

## It's Fiat doing what Fiat – with 23 million B-segment cars shifted across Europe to date – does best

Stray too far beyond £30k and, like Icarus, it risked oblivion.

A very palatable £22,995 gets you into a 120hp Evolution-spec car with the smaller battery (193 miles officially). Something like our 5, a top-spec, 150hp Iconic 5 (the more powerful powertrain also gets the bigger 52kWh battery, dubbed 'comfort' in Renault speak), starts at £28,995 (£30,195 as tested). But go green to save on paint and you can get a 150hp mid-tier Techno comfort for £26,995, or £216 per month with Renault's zero per cent APR offer.

For a car you'll likely order in bright yellow or green, and that can be plastered with any number of sticker sets, this is a very grown-up machine. Gorgeous on the outside, if anything it's even nicer inside. Twin glossy screens sit high on the dash, highlights to a cockpit that's otherwise big on analogue, retro-futuristic funk; the cool curved edge to the dash on the passenger side, stitched like something from a '70s supercar; the quasi bucket-seats in a tactile, textural green/grey fabric that remind me of my wonderful old 205 XS.

You're spoiled, too, with heated seats and steering wheel, USBs everywhere, wireless phone charging and native Google, which comes into its own when you're stringing together charging stops on longer drives. You also get customisable drive modes and easy-off electronic nannying. Two prods of a button and 'My Safety Perso' kicks in, ridding the wheel of its tuggy lane-keep assisting and your sanity of the speed limit bonging. You could be very happy here, at least up front. While the 5 has four doors, trumping the two-door

Mini for rear-seat access, the Panda's a good deal more spacious in the back. And while today's smooth roads flatter all three cars, I suspect the Panda will be the one to float over gnarlier UK tarmac.

The best car here? Excuse me while I squirm like a worm at the neck of a tequila bottle. The 5 is the most rounded, the most desirable and the most complete. It blends a chunk of the Panda's practicality with more than a dash of the Mini's hedonistic driver appeal. But to suggest the Renault is some sort of vanilla middle ground is to entirely fail to communicate the flair with which this car's been conceived and executed. It is the antithesis of all the derogatory terms – soulless, anodyne, white goods – usually levelled at EVs, and burns so brightly in the Renault line-up you can't wait to see what the French make will do next (erm, the similarly funky Twingo).

But keen drivers should still look to the Cooper E, particularly if they only ever use rear seats for gym bags and drunk mates. It represents a big step forward over the compromised, previous-gen electric Mini. But it also costs an awful lot of money for a quite compromised car, both in terms of interior space and battery capacity/range. Going very light on options and stretching your budget to the longer-range SE would be tempting, but my perfect Cooper – the less powerful motor with the bigger battery – doesn't exist.

What of the Panda? As Seth points out, it is an authentic reboot of the source material, and truly a car for our times. Laudably affordable, relatively light, heavy on charm and undeniably uplifting, it's also a packaging masterclass, and really the only car here you can imagine doing duty as a family's only car. It's also Fiat doing what Fiat – with 23 million B-segment cars shifted across Europe to date – does best.

For a while now Europe, divided, troubled and dwarfed by the twin titans of Chinese manufacturing and American rhetoric, has been looking more than a little tertiary, and in need of a couple of modern miracles in the vein of Issigonis' original masterpiece or Giugiaro's boxy blockbuster. And here they are. **car**



**FIAT GRANDE PANDA**

**PRICE** From £20,975 (£23,975 as tested)

**POWERTRAIN** 44kWh battery, e-motor, front-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 111bhp, 90lb ft, 11.5sec 0-62mph, 82mph

**WEIGHT** 1554kg

**EFFICIENCY** 3.85 miles per kWh, 199-mile range, 0g/km CO2

**ON SALE** Now



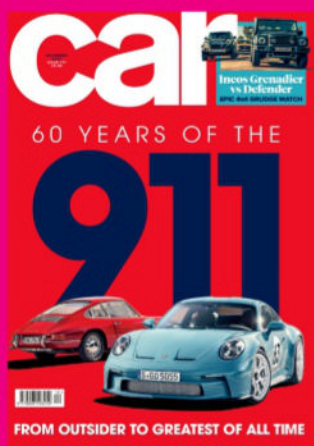
Let's go back  
to the future



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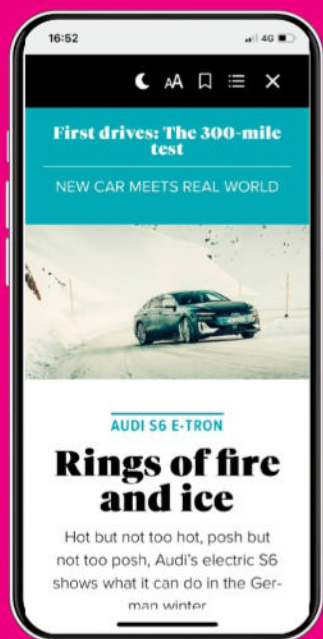


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# BOTH BARRRELS







BMW doesn't want you to know about this just yet, but the next M3 will come in two flavours: 2027's electric iM3 followed a year later by a petrol version. Here's everything we know about the dynamisch duo

Words Georg Kacher Illustrations Lars Sältzer



F

or the first time, buyers of the BMW M3 will be able to choose from two fundamentally different models. While G84 denotes the direct replacement for the combustion-engined six-cylinder version, Z40 is the internal code of the all-electric four-wheel-drive iM3 (which may end up wearing an M3i badge). There will also be an estate version of the electric M3, codenamed Z41.

It's a massive change, and involves some collateral damage. The combustion M4 will exit the range, as will the M3 estate. Dubbed G85, the second-generation M4 was originally planned to debut in summer 2028 and run through late 2034, but it's now been deemed insufficiently profitable. The same thinking is behind the decision to not replace the current M3 Touring when production of the current model ends in February 2027 at the latest. There will, however, be an electric iM4, we understand.

The combustion and electric M3s will look similar but not identi-



Unexpected new generation of petrol M3 must surely be the last... mustn't it?



cal. That's roughly in line with the thinking that has given us near-indistinguishable 5-series/i5, 7-series/i7, X1/iX1 and X2/iX2. But while those pairings all use one platform for two powertrains, that's not happening with the new M3s.

The iM3 is a member of the Neue Klasse family, whereas the M3 is based on an evolution of the familiar CLAR matrix. The different underpinnings give the two cars a different wheelbase and overhangs, which is clear when they're parked side by side.

The iM3 has a longer if barely roomier cabin, and while its front end is quite a bit shorter, the rear looks boxier and taller. It rides on a skateboard platform, which raises the floorpan by about 100mm, but the two cars' overall height is similar.

Both have a much more aggressive widebody treatment than non-M versions, plus a slightly lower stance due to the standard steel sports suspension, dramatically flared wings, a comprehensive aero

kit and more substantial wheels and tyres.

At the recent CES tech show in Nevada, BMW let us catch a few glimpses of the camouflaged real thing, which reappeared a couple of weeks later during winter tests. It's still two years away from going on sale, but in its current form the most striking design elements are the restyled bumpers, large areas of contrasting black paint and some details inspired by the M5 and XM. Check out, for instance, the distinctive double-shovel lower air intakes, the split horizontal grille with adjacent multi-mode four-dot matrix headlights and the butch rear end complete with diffuser, subtle air dam and two low-riding black pockets, divided by a trapezoidal body-colour centre section. In the case of the petrol M3, those pockets house two tailpipes each.

You can also expect bespoke low-drag door mirrors, aero-look wheels, a prominent near-full-width bonnet scoop and a bespoke light signature. Still unconfirmed are optional M-motif rear side ►

**IT'S A MASSIVE CHANGE, AND INVOLVES SOME COLLATERAL DAMAGE. THE M4 WILL EXIT THE RANGE, AS WILL THE M3 ESTATE**





# New M3 duo previewed

Our images are based on inside intel and spy shots



window projections and the debut of BMW's electrophoretic e-ink body wrap, which can change colour and pattern in static and dynamic form; it may not be ready for production in time. The M3 duo will use the full-width Panoramic Vision display which runs along the bottom of the windscreen, complementing the hexagonal centre touchscreen and the multi-functional four-spoke steering-wheel.

The cockpit will also flaunt its M status with some special graphics, extra apps and a dedicated sportier look with matching seats and trim. While the large revcounter is no longer a prominent feature of the M3, the iM3 offers plenty of added EV-related info via Panoramic Vision and the optional extended head-up display.

The cab-backward M3 looks more traditional next to the short-nosed electric iM3, but it needs that longer front end to harbour the straight-six, which is again mounted longitudinally. It will no longer be available with manual transmission or with rear-wheel drive.

While Mercedes angered the AMG fan base by downgrading the latest C63 from a V8 to a four-cylinder plug-in hybrid, BMW will field a heavily revised 48-volt mild-hybrid edition of its 3.0-litre engine, sources say. Fit to meet future emission regulations, the twin-turbo unit is expected to deliver around 535bhp and at least 480lb ft.

The next M3 is claimed to be significantly more efficient than the

model it replaces. Key to the cleaner, torquier and more powerful engine is the staggered pre-chamber ignition patented last August. The twin-spark system splits the combustion process by igniting the mixture in the pre-chamber with an ignition electrode before passing it on to the main combustion chamber, where a conventional spark plug fires the second salvo.

According to those in the know, the M3 will again eclipse its predecessor in all key dynamic departments, but it is unlikely to come close to the outputs and performance figures of the electric iM3 (even if the EV doesn't actually deliver the one megawatt, or 1341bhp, R&D chief Frank Weber has hinted at). After all, almost anything is possible when a 100kWh-plus battery, an 800-volt electrical system, four state-of-the-art e-motors and powerful processing combine.

It's still early days, but right now the Garching grapevine is predicting between 680 and 750bhp for the regular iM3 and around 810bhp for the tarmac-peeling CS version expected to follow. Peak torque? Anything from 515 to 885lb ft is possible, sources reveal; the decision will depend on BMW's assessment of where on the scale of performance vs range customers want the electric M3 to sit.

The 10 to 80 per cent charge time is likely to be a little over 10 minutes with the right charger, and the maximum driving range will reportedly increase by 30 per cent compared to the i4 M60.

The major innovation of the iM3 is the four-motor layout, which assigns one dedicated motor to each wheel. The individual propulsion units are – together with steering, chassis and brakes – master-minded by a single control unit which used to be known as Hand of God before internal concerns over blasphemy triggered a name ►

If the real electric M3 is even half this thrilling, job done



## RIDING IN THE ELECTRIC M3... SORT OF

As we climb into what looks like the official transport of Marty the zebra, the nice man from BMW is keen to point out that this four-door, bulked-up, high-performance saloon is *not* the new BMW iM3. And, fair enough, any lingering thoughts are quickly extinguished when the pilot, BMW factor driver Jens Klingman, fires up the ground-effect impeller system that creates max downforce in the blink of an eye from just 40mph.

This car is a working prototype, a vehicle for trying out new and sometimes fanciful bits of tech that can provide crucial data for future BMWs. A test mule. But while we won't be seeing a production car that uses every idea being tried out here, that doesn't mean elements of it won't have a strong bearing on BMWs from the near future.

So it's tempting, and legitimate, to draw some possible parallels between the experience of this BMW Vision prototype and the new electric M3. And what's quickly apparent – as we speed off in a flurry of high-pitched whine and tyre smoke from all four wheels – is just how well the car handles its mass.

BMW won't tell us much about the specs on this prototype, but given that there are four of us on board,

with laptops and datalogging equipment, plus what must be four electric motors and the impeller system, it's staying eerily flat and composed through a series of difficult off-camber corners. It feels like rotation, both into and out of a corner, is available on demand. And there's none of the inertia you'd expect from a car that must be running at over two tonnes.

For years now we've been told that EV powertrains open up dynamic possibilities unavailable to combustion cars. This car seems to prove the truth of that claim, although having Jens at the wheel helps

enormously. He can manipulate a car like few others can.

BMW's Werner Haumayr speaks of feel and responses as being crucial differentiators of future M performance cars, with the single Heart of Joy ECU critical to that.

All four of us in the car are laughing as we round the final few corners, EV motors screaming, opposite lock aplenty and the cabin filled with tyre smoke channelled through an open window. It's not an M3 as we know it – officially it's not an M3 at all – but there are plenty of reasons to be excited about it.

**JAMES DENNISON**





Estate version of iM3 will follow, but combustion car will be saloon only



**THE GARCHING GRAPEVINE  
PREDICTS 680-750BHP  
FOR THE REGULAR iM3  
AND 810BHP FOR THE CS  
VERSION EXPECTED TO  
FOLLOW**

change to Heart of Joy. Unlike current M cars, which harbour several dozen individual computers that take a lot longer to interact, the iM3 has the one powerful mainframe system to mastermind traction and stability in all situations, at all speeds and on all surfaces.

Comments the CEO of BMW M, Frank van Meel: 'Designed in-house, the superfast and extremely precise logic controls this high-performance car in the same seamless and natural way a conductor interacts with the orchestra, thereby opening the door to a level of vehicle dynamics which breaks new ground.'

New from bottom top, Neue Klasse will underpin products as varied as the iX3 SUV and the standard electric 3-series as well as dedicated sporty models like iM3 and iM4. M division was involved in the development programme from day one, so M division CTO Dirk Häcker's team could define not only a bespoke drivetrain but also model-specific hardware like axles, brakes, tyres, steering and a wide variety of bodywork reinforcements.

Contract suppliers such as Samsung SDI and CATL are going to build the next-generation batteries to the exact high-performance



chemistry specification mapped out by M division. We expect 4695 (46mm diameter, 95mm height) upright cells rather than the previously used prismatic pouches for a dramatically improved energy density, ultra-fast charging capability and an extended lifespan.

BMW typically produces its e-motors in-house and this also applies to the advanced Gen6 units earmarked for the Neue Klasse – with the noted exception of the ZA models like the iM3. Recent speculation has pointed towards to DeepDrive, a Munich start-up also associated with Continental, Hyundai and Schaeffler, which specialises in dual-rotor in-wheel radial-flux propulsion units. Up to 150kg lighter than conventional motors, they do without rare earths and are substantially smaller and less expensive. Although BMW and DeepDrive may indeed strike a mid-term co-operation agreement, iM3 and iM4 will almost certainly use high-performance motors purchased from a different specialist source. But just like the batteries, the characteristics of the high-revving, super-responsive power units were defined in every detail by M division.

The stopping apparatus is believed to be conventional, with the

option of extra-potent carbon-ceramic rotors. The steering, too, is essentially straightforward – rear-wheel steering would add weight and complexity, and with up to 220lb ft of instant torque per wheel you probably have all the extra kinetic play this car ever needs on tap.

After all, the Heart of Joy controller can be programmed for all sorts of dramatic antics, from assisted four-wheel slides to crabbing, tank turns and near parallel parking on low-friction surfaces. Also expect a simulated gearchange, which should be a particularly emotional part of the iM3 driving experience. We expect plenty of haptic and acoustic feedback, virtual yet highly physical up- and downshifts, and specific software mapping for all occasions.

Rivals? Look beyond the CLA 45S AMG 4Matic EQ due later this year to 2027's AMG version of the electric C-Class based on the MB.EA-M matrix, rated at an unconfirmed 600bhp; that sounds like a serious contender. The new all-electric Audi A4 is unlikely to arrive before 2029, but the direct competition needn't come from Germany. Japan, Korea and even fast-developing Chinese manufacturers could be about to make life very interesting for M3 buyers. **car**





**THE ULTIMATE**  
**EVERYTHING**  
**MACHINE**





## 50 YEARS OF THE BMW 3-SERIES

**From everyday greatness to some of the most iconic performance cars of all time, the 3-series is omni-talented. We celebrate its first half century**

Photography John Wycherley





# THE MAGIC NUMBER

Seven reasons we love the 3-series, BMW's sexy slice of everyday genius

Photography BMW archive



1

## It's ridiculously flexible

Is there a car on the planet that's been more things to more drivers than the BMW 3-series? It's crammed as much into 50 years as some entire car companies have fitted into 100. A fuel-sipping diesel, a homologation special and Touring Car champ, a convertible, coupe, saloon and chic estate... The 3-series has got every T-shirt, and looked good in all of them. And somehow, despite those very different remits, there's a common thread of character and feel that runs through every single one.

The 3-series has also rolled with the punches that 50 years of legal and cultural changes bring, and thrown a few back. Today's xDrive four-wheel-drive cars serve up extra stability without ruining the fun we have in the rear-wheel-drive models. And as far back as the '80s, the 3-series somehow made diesels feel sporty, and then pivoted to hybrids when we needed another solution to saving fuel, money and the planet.

Which is why we're not worried that the first 3-series EV might not feel like a 3-series. 'Electric? I got this,' it says. We bet it has.

Chris Chilton

2

## The driving position's perfection

The modern mass market might all be about sitting up high, but BMW still understands that a low seating position is fundamental to connecting you to the car – even my 2009 320i has a sports car's driving position.

Sure, you can crank yourself into the headlining if you fancy. But grab a handle on the side of the seat (manual adjustment is always so much better and usually drops the seat lower) and you'll disappear into the floor like a Bond villain just dispatched you to a shark tank below. Your backside drops lower than knees, legs dead ahead... perfect.

Pedal placing is equally intuitive, with a firm brake that's an easy roll of your foot away from the throttle – the better for heel-and-toe and therefore the better to keep the car balanced while downshifting and braking.

Reach and rake adjustment gets the steering wheel just so, the gearshift is an easy hand-span from the wheel... this a racer's ethos distilled to a family saloon, and an often under-appreciated ingredient in what makes BMW's mid-size exec so engaging to drive.

Ben Barry

3

## It's a heroic race car

That the M3 has always raced and been quick and won will come as news to absolutely no one. But lesser 3s have also done the business on track, most spectacularly in the ever-evolving British Touring Car Championship. There, against all-wheel-drive Audis, some more prosaic front-drive opposition (Primera, anyone?) and those very 'optimised' Alfa Romeo 155s, the BMW has always been right in the mix, its essential rightness (driven wheels at the correct end of the car, engine at the other) making it both look right being driven at ten-tenths and so fundamentally better suited to the job at hand that it was often hit with all manner of 'for the love of God can you please just be less quick' handicaps.

Great drivers too, and some iconic liveries. Top of the pile sits Steve Soper in his Listerine-backed 318is, immortalised in that "I'm going for first," says Cleland" Murray Walker YouTube clip. John Cleland, in his ballistic Cavalier, refuses to let Soper's flying BMW go. But on that day in October 1992, Soper wasn't backing down either. And as we know, two into one doesn't go, even when one's a 3.

Ben Miller





Those angles,  
those proportions:  
they never get old



4

### It's a sports car in disguise

The very fact an M3 can hold its own against a Porsche 911 Carrera is remarkable – one upgraded from a mass-market 318i, the other a blueblood sports car which *starts* from £100k.

Then consider that sports cars like said 911 demand such compromise in their pursuit of driving nirvana. Want to carry a family or friends? Squeeze in a load of luggage? It's where the M3 has always found its niche. That M cars also cost significantly less, like for like, and are typically cheaper to run only strengthens their hand.

This is not to make allowances, because the M3 has always been serious enough to go head-to-head with proper, clean-sheet sports cars.

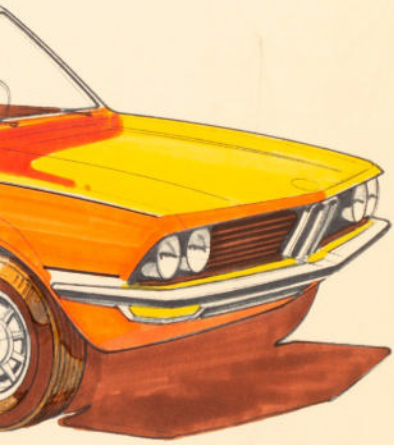
The straight-six engines and V8s found in all M3s are up with the best engines in the world (the first four-pot not so much). An E46 M3 CSL gave the 911 GT3 a run for its money back in period and today is typically worth more, frequently breaching £100k. A modern M3 Touring offers more stretch than any 3-series ever built. No one but BMW gets closer to the purity of a sports car with so much practicality.

**Ben Barry**

## THE STRAIGHT-SIX IS INHERENTLY PERFECT – BALANCED IN A WAY NO V6 OR FOUR CAN EVER BE

Links between  
road and track  
less fanciful for  
BMW than most





6

## It's always had style

When *The Times* wrote about the '75 EU Referendum, it used an image of the first 3-series to illustrate the benefits of membership. In those days you could still buy a Morris Marina, and the small BMW was a perfect symbol of a technically advanced civilisation. It had modernity and reeked of worldly *savoir faire*, or, more properly, *Fachwissen*. Its style had evolved from the '61 Neue Klasse and its successor, the 02 series: prominent belt line, big glasshouse, no fuss.

In the '80s I often visited Munich's *Museum fur Angewandte Kunst* (Applied Art). Herr Direktor became a friend. Of course, he drove a BMW. Its Bauhaus sensibility was a perfect reflection in the outside world of the furniture and product designs he was busy curating.

This year, when a business magazine ran a melancholy article about the decline of German industry, it used a cartoon-ish illustration of a 3-series. The message was indisputable: this car was German industrial art at its very best; as beautiful as a Braun food-mixer.

**Stephen Bayley**

7

## Sixes fit like a glove

The first 3-series didn't have one, at least initially. Most of the new ones no longer do. But six cylinders slip into a 3-series like cream in a layer cake, complementing an impressive chassis with a deep swell of smooth performance.

Turbodiesels, naturally-aspirated petrols, twin-turbo M engines – rarely do BMW sixes miss the mark. The inline-six is inherently perfect, of course, ideally balanced in a way no V6 or four can ever be, and BMW has had *quite a lot* of practice at it – it's been honing its craft for more than a century.

A BMW six is also core to my favourite 3-series memories, from an M20 hauling an E30 325i uphill at a relative's in New Zealand to the warm tones of the S50B30 in my beloved old E36 M3.

Today, the twin-turbo S58 is key to the appeal of the brilliant new M3. Making 542bhp in an M3 CS, it's a long way from the 120bhp you'd coax out of a 320/6 in 1977. But the fundamental rightness of an inline-six in a compact BMW runs through the ages.

**Ben Barry**

5

## Even the base models are fun

BMW will always talk you up to xDrive, sixes and M3s (and very good they are too). But even four-cylinder SE-spec 3-series have a balance and focus rarely found on other entry-level saloons.

Plump for a rear-drive four with few options and you'll not only have the lightest car in the range, you'll also benefit from less weight over the nose and smaller wheels, reducing unsprung weight – the 318i is 225kg lighter than an M340i.

A facelifted 2017 320d was a riot over my benchmark B-road, all sweet steering, front-end bite and adjustable balance that let me carry momentum *everywhere*.

But it's the latest-gen 330i that strikes the best compromise between performance, affordability and peachy dynamics in today's range. Yes, it's more mid- than base-spec, but it's a four-cylinder these days, and with rear-drive and the rare LSD, a 330i proved so much fun through the Dolomites in 2019 I genuinely feared for the engineers tasked with topping it with the M3.

That they did so is no surprise, but it was a lesson in how satisfying these less overtly sporting Threes can be.

**Ben Barry**



**Six cylinders driving the rear wheels: not the only way, but a very good one**



E21 (1975-1983)

# ALIVE AND KICKING

So much for that 'difficult second album' trope. BMW smashed it out of the park with the 1982-94 E30, which is so fondly remembered despite its flaws it's bagged two of the seven slots in this 3-series celebration package. But like that tight lid you couldn't quite undo but clearly loosened for the next person, the original and now overlooked E21 3-series did much of the graft so its successor could get the glory.

Conceptually, if not visually, the E21 as launched in 1975 seems far closer to the 02-series cars it replaced than the E30 that followed. There was no sign of the four-door saloon, estate or convertible variants; no M3, diesel or four-wheel-drive options that the second-generation 3-series would bring. Just a small two-door coupe-cum-saloon with a choice of M10 fours.

But the first 3-series really did move the game on from the 02. The E21's crisp, industrial design borrowed from the 1972 5-series, sharper rack-and-pinion steering, big, clear instruments and face-level venti-

lation (I'm not kidding; '70s reviewers waxed lyrical) made the 02 look prehistoric. And that driver-focused curved dashboard in your modern BMW? Thank the trailblazing E21.

But with modernity came middle-aged spread. At launch, the 3-series was heavier and slower, sacrificing some of the hard-won sporting cred BMW had gained in the '60s and early '70s with its Neue Klasse cars. No, the E21 made its debut in 1975, but the 3-series *arrived* in 1977. That's when Munich's engineers dropped a pair of straight-six engines under the forward-folding bonnet (though Brits had to wait until '78 to get their hands on them).

Millions of 3-series models have been sold over the last 50 years with only four pistons doing the pushing. Some have had more; some only three. And these days you can't even buy a six-cylinder 3-series without an M badge. But for decades the idea of six cylinders was key to the aspirational appeal of a 3-series, even if you in reality

ended up with a 318.

The carb-fed 121bhp, 2.0-litre 320/6 wasn't much faster than the four-pot it replaced, and didn't look much different either. But the 323i's 141bhp finally put performance back on the small-BMW menu. Sixty in eight seconds and a 120mph top whack could keep you ahead of most things, including the old 2002 tii.

Both sixes got quad headlights and a rear anti-roll bar, but only the injected car came with rear discs, vented fronts and a pair of wheelbarrow-handle-style exhausts - a design motif BMW resurrected for 2007's turbocharged 335i, and which you'll find on every model in the 2025 non-M line-up.

Later generations of 3-series were much faster, tighter, more refined and less terrifying to drive quickly in the wet. But the current car and every other sports saloon promising performance and premium in one package owes a debt to the E21 323i.

CHRIS CHILTON







### **323i (E21)**

Sharp style, six-cylinder speed and rear-drive dynamic flair for days – this is where it all began

**POWERTRAIN** 2315cc 12v straight-six, four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 141bhp @ 6000rpm, 140lb ft @ 4500rpm, 8.2sec 0-60mph, 120mph

**LEGACY** Every modern sports saloon started here





E30 (1982-1994)

# FANTASTIC FOUR

At school, me and my mate Alastair were convinced we'd be front-running F1 drivers. And I don't mean we daydreamed about it. I mean we were convinced. Weirdly, I don't recall either of us being at all worried about the fact that, at 15, that ship had clearly already sailed.

We would, we figured, end up as teammates. One of us would likely have to punt the other one off to secure the title. So be it. We were, we decided, cool with that. And it had to be F1. Sportscar racing was great but no. Ditto WRC. If there was an exception it was Group A touring cars, and that was down to one car: the E30 M3.

The E30 M3 wouldn't have existed without Group A racing, and the car was as shameless a homologation special as it's possible to imagine, created to win first and shift the required number of units second. The earlier 635 CSi had been a handy racer but the E30 M3 was next level, leveraging everything the car would need to win into its sleeker, wider bodyshell, including a powerful and high-revving four. Yes, the Group A E30 M3 looked good; purposeful, featherweight, balanced somehow. But it sounded even better. The noise – savagely loud, thick with texture and hysterical at the redline – was entirely unlike any other inline-four.

You might think a straight-six would have made a more obvious start point for a race-winning engine, offering smaller, lighter pistons for a given capacity and more revs (crucial when turbos weren't an option). But there was method in engine guru Paul Rosche's madness. A shorter engine made for a shorter, stiffer crank and more revs. And BMW had a fine track record for hustling hefty power outputs from fours. Think the turbocharged F1 engine in the back of the early-'80s Brabhams (the BT50, BT52/BT52B and BT53), not to mention the 2.0-litre twin-cam F2 engines Rosche had persuaded to more than 300bhp without a turbo.

One of these M10-based specials, dubbed the M12/7, was tested in an E21 3-series (can you imagine!) and the results were spectacular, instantly green-lighting the 2332cc S14 motor.

The S14, related to the M1 supercar's six, was capable of cranking out 300bhp at 8000rpm and spinning to 10,000rpm without issue. It was reliable too, once M

sorted the vibration issues with an increased stroke and smaller, lighter pistons.

In the biddable and agile E30 M3, the engine was all but unbeatable. By the time the car finally retired, after six years of racing, it'd won a world championship, two European titles and over 60 national championships, not to mention eight wins in the Nürburgring and Spa 24-hour races.

After decades spent casually worshipping the thing from afar, I finally drove an E30 M3 for a few hours, high on a sun-drenched Alpine pass. A tight and cherished BMW Classic car, it was everything I hoped it would be: quick, compact and so

ridiculously communicative you could do anything with it. In a moment's quiet contemplation that afternoon, I decided I could drive one the rest of my life and be deliriously, sickeningly happy.

But, as we know, human beings are horribly predisposed to greed. Just an hour later that contentment was gone, replaced by daydreams of a road-legal Group A-spec example with another 100bhp, fat slicks on BBS wheels and a cockpit that held nothing but me, my seat and acres of bare metal, the monocoque an echo chamber for the S14's savage majesty.

**BEN MILLER**







### M3 GROUP A DTM (E30)

Dominant doesn't cover it

**POWERTRAIN** 2332cc 16v  
four-cylinder, five-speed manual,  
rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 300bhp @  
8000rpm, 214lb ft @ 7500rpm,  
4.3sec 0-60mph, 196mph

**LEGACY** Proved once and for all that  
feisty road cars make great racers, and  
vice versa





E30 (1982-1994)

# 1989'S M3

## CS TOURING

The 325iX was my first scoop as a motoring journalist, a career now in its 50th year. Driving home from a ski trip to Austria, we spotted an undisguised pre-production model and pinned ourselves to its heels on the snow-covered Grossglockner pass, eventually catching the ferociously spinning front wheels on camera from the passenger seat of a five-cylinder Audi 80 quattro, which had pioneered permanent four-wheel drive in 1982, ahead of BMW.

While quattro was only available in combination with a DIY gearbox and in a four-door saloon, Ingolstadt's arch-rival launched a much broader tech attack by offering xDrive with a choice of manual or automatic transmission and in four different body styles: two- and four-door notchback, the rare TC4 targa convertible by coachbuilder Baur and the Touring estate, which beat the 80 Avant to the showrooms by a full five years. The first 4Matic-equipped Mercedes C-Class T-model arrived over a decade later.

What sounds like clever strategic thinking was actually the result of individual vision, courage and action. As CTO Karlheinz Radermacher chose to painstakingly comply with chairman Eberhard von Kuenheim's rigorous cost-cutting orders, advanced product planning was firmly in the hands of the extremely active shadow skunkworks where underground warriors like Wilfried Ball (who almost single-handedly developed the E30 3-series cabriolet) and Hans Hagen (Radermacher's successor and father of the very first Touring) spent long weekends in the Munich body shop and on the Ismaning test track and back roads of Bavaria.

In top-of-the-line guise, the 325iX Touring was – together with the AMC Eagle – the world's first true crossover. It joined the E30 line-up in the second half of the '80s and just made it into the '90s, although not every country got it for all or indeed any of that time. Their loss.

While the stacked suspension and the trick all-wheel-drive system raised the off-road capability to a cut above the rest, the

smooth six-cylinder engine and the ace ergonomics underlined its status as a driver's car from the top drawer.

Compromised by a 140kg weight penalty, a higher centre of gravity and the stilted all-terrain chassis, the five-door 325iX didn't handle quite as inspiringly as the rear-wheel-drive models. It was also substantially thirstier, the steering allowed itself more haptic leeway, and the rev-hungry character of the smooth-running 168bhp 2.5-litre engine, which needed 4300rpm to dish up an unexciting maximum torque of 164lb ft, resulted in less urgent in-gear acceleration.

Expensive, too. Although alloy wheels

shod with 195/65VR14 tyres, four disc brakes and anti-lock (which cost extra on rear-drive cars) were standard, all-wheel drive and the four-speed automatic pushed up the base price to the level of a bigger, quicker 530i.

Add to this the petite 370-litre boot, and the on-paper form doesn't look that irresistible. But on bumpy roads, iffy surfaces and steep gradients, Munich's neo-SUV was a real hoot to drive. As soon as you fired up that responsive inline-six, fused with the intuitive controls and sweet, sweet balance, and set off for a long weekend, nothing else came close.

GEORG KACHER







### 325ix TOURING (E30)

Debuted the do-anything 3-series

**POWERTRAIN** 2494cc 12v  
straight-six, five-speed manual,  
rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 168bhp @  
5800rpm, 164lb ft @ 4000rpm,  
9.7sec 0-62mph, 129mph

**LEGACY** Touring body style plus  
four-wheel-drive utility – genius





E36 (1990-2000)

# GO JOHNNY GO

Everyone knows BMW supplied the McLaren F1's V12, but few know McLaren returned the favour with tweaks to BMW's E36 3-series racecar. And in the peak of the '90s Super Touring era no less.

This car is your proof – the 320i STW Johnny Cecotto drove to victory in Germany's 1998 Super Tourenwagen Cup. It's the most highly evolved form of the E36 from the best touring-car era ever.

The E36 didn't enjoy the straightforward road-to-race journey of the previous 2.3-litre E30 M3. The rulebook was changing from Group A to the Super Touring 2.0-litre class and – from 1993 – a four-door category. The new 3.0-litre M3 couldn't race, at least in Touring Cars.

No matter. BMW slotted a 2.0-litre version of the old M3's S14 engine into the E36, pushed the driver 80mm further back in a chassis suspended by an all-new MacPherson front/multi-link rear set-up, and for some reason called it the 318i.

This new not-M3 got off to a belting start, winning the BTCC in its '92 debut season and taking German, Italian and British titles for 1993. But then the quattro Audis arrived, the Alfas sprouted wings

and budgets sky-rocketed. In response, BMW squeezed 280bhp at 8500rpm from a new S42 dry-sumped 2.0-litre engine, added a larger rear wing and front splitter and switched to a new sequential gearbox.

Cecotto won the inaugural Super Tourenwagen Cup in 1994, but soon the ultimate driving machine also began to lose against a predominantly front-wheel-drive and often less premium opposition.

Enter Jeff Hazell in late 1995. One of the key players behind McLaren's Le Mans-winning F1 GTR, Hazell – and McLaren more widely – were called in to help BMW Team Schnitzer ahead of the 1996 BTCC season, but the changes were rolled out worldwide.

Now called 320i, the aerodynamic package was honed in the same wind tunnel as McLaren F1 cars, a new rear axle was introduced to a bespoke chassis already rich in aluminium and magnesium, the fine details sweated. Back in Germany, BMW Motorsport got 305bhp from the S42 – not bad in a saloon that weighed 1000kg.

Recalls Cecotto: 'The 320i was nice to drive and improved everywhere compared to 1994. It was fast in corners and with

good braking potential. But acceleration and top speed weren't the best, which didn't help for overtaking in battles against other cars.'

BMW quit the BTCC after placing a lowly fifth in 1996, but with more work for 1997 the 320i took Super Touring titles everywhere from Australia to Italy. Cecotto signed off the E36 era in 1998 with a win in Germany's fiercely contested Super Tourenwagen Cup.

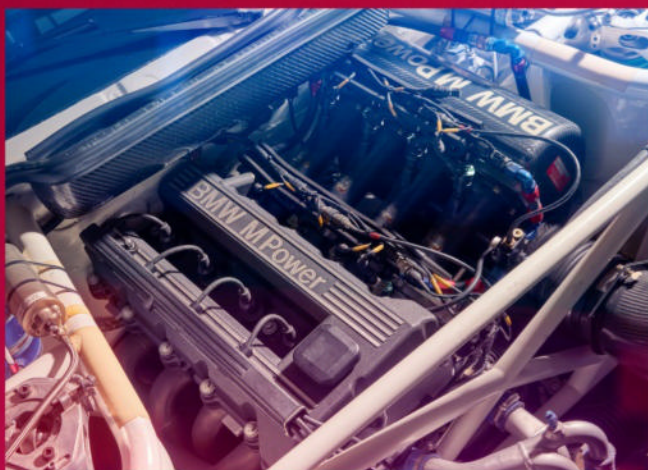
'The championship was decided in the last race at the Nürburgring, so it was the biggest battle of the year from the first corner until the last against the Audis and [Laurent] Aiello's Peugeot,' says Cecotto.

Ultimately Cecotto prevailed by just three points over reigning champion Aiello. E30 M3s are lovely things, but this is your ultimate 3-series Touring Car.

**BEN BARRY**







### **320i STW (E36)**

BMW's McLaren-fettled thoroughbred

**POWERTRAIN** 1998cc 16v

four-cylinder, six-speed sequential,  
rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 305bhp @

8300rpm, 195lb ft @ 7000rpm,  
n/a sec 0-60mph, 174mph

**LEGACY** Cemented the 3's status as a  
performance icon





E46 (1997-2006)

# SOMETHING IN THE AIR







You can thank Princess Di. Her rise to global mega-stardom involved countless images of her in an Audi 80 convertible and later the A4 version; images that contributed to a huge boom in sales for open-top cars, and which made it clear to a whole new bunch of people that premium European cars were not just for architects in rimless spectacles and those who like to take their holidays at the Nürburgring.

It was a packed field. The Audi cabrios were up against Mercedes, Saabs, the half-size-smaller Golf, and other less impressive alternatives including the Volvo C70. (The Volvo is the one that deserves the sneering that's unfairly applied to the species.)

And of course there was the BMW 3-series convertible. This was a big seller, at a time when everyone's premium convertibles were selling well, as were 3-series models generally, the mainstream having cottoned on to how good they were, and employers having twigged that offering a BMW as a company car could be much cheaper than giving their staff pay rises.

There had never been a 3-series line-up as extensive as the E46 generation. Saloon, estate, Compact, coupe and convertible – all with a big choice of powertrains – and not forgetting the M versions. And that's without counting the adjacent Z3.

The two generations before the E46 included convertible versions, as did the succeeding E90, although that fell into the then-popular trap of having a folding hardtop, after which the convertible became a 4-series. But there's a strong argument that the E46 convertible (built from 1999 to 2006) is the sweet spot.

That opinion isn't one based on looks. Like the rest of this generation of 3-series, it had lost the angular modernity of its

predecessors, smoothed off into a blandness that hasn't aged well. Signed off by Chris Bangle, the exterior was the work of Erik Goplen. You can't fault it, viewed through the prism of its commercial success – more than 270,000 E46 convertibles were built – but it wouldn't look particularly uncomfortable wearing a Rover or even Jaguar badge.

Rather, it worked so well because the engineers had done a great job, adding extra stiffness to every body style in the E46 line-up and making sure it handled and rode in a way that wasn't compromised by its lack of fixed roof. It was based on the other two-door in the range, the coupe, so it rode slightly lower than the saloon and estate, giving it a purposeful stance.

Inside, it was nice but not fancy: premium, BMW-style. Anyone driving this as their first BMW would have been mighty impressed by the things that the hardcore had known for years: these cars engage you in the driving process, giving plenty of feedback, but don't punish you for sometimes wanting to just waft around.

Also, the seatbelt mounting, built into the seat in the absence of a B-pillar, was just a lovely bit of work.

At this time, BMW hadn't really got the hang of diesels and automatics. So best to default to the classic rear-wheel-drive BMW combination of six-cylinder petrol and manual gearbox. Going for a six means it won't be dirt cheap, even today, but that also (with a bit of luck) increases the chances of a used example having been owned by people who cared about the engineering, not just the image.

A 100,000-mile 330i for around £3000 doesn't like a terrible idea, does it?

**COLIN OVERLAND**

## **330Ci (E46)**

Dynamism with open skies

**POWERTRAIN** 2979cc 24v straight-six, six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 228bhp @ 5900rpm, 221lb ft @ 3500rpm, 6.9sec 0-60mph, 154mph

**LEGACY** A much broader customer base for BMW





E46 (1997-2006)

# THE SPECIAL ONE

The E46 M3 is my generation of 3-series. It came at a time when my mates and I had all recently passed our driving tests, university was a booze-addled fug of a memory and our first pay cheques were rolling in.

With no social media or even much of an internet to turn our heads, it was a time of simpler aspiration, when what seemed like 99 per cent of us drove around in old Volkswagen Golfs (TDI for those in the know, SDI for those with too much uni debt to pay off) but what we all *really* lusted after was the BMW M3.

Even from the vantage point of a 148bhp diesel VW, the BMW felt within reach, blending a mix of blistered-arch exotica and saloon-car attainability that was missing from the much more sports car-ish 911.

With an M3 as my north star, my world was happy. Then along came the CSL and confused me.

Here was a car that should have reinforced everything I loved about the M3 and turned the dial round even more. For starters, it was a significant 110kg lighter than the standard car thanks to elements like manual seats, a paper honeycomb boot floor, less sound insulation and no air-con.

It also had the exclusivity of a carbon-fibre roof (the first on a production M car) to lend it a dash of F1 glamour and an uprated, naturally-aspirated straight-six that pushed out an extra 17bhp. It even nixed the undesirable reputation that normal M3s were beginning to acquire, since BMW only built 1383 of them. It wasn't obvious and therefore it was cool.

But it wasn't without concerns. Astonishingly, it was nearly 50 per cent more expensive than the standard M3, pushing it well into 911 territory, and there was a feeling the new tyres might be *too* hardcore. These were virtually road-legal slicks, a set of Michelin Pilot Sport Cups that were amazing in the dry but had dubious wet grip, to the point where BMW put warning stickers in the car.

And so it remained, an outlier with a question mark. And then I got to drive one, nearly 20 years later. Finally, my world was complete – everything that M should stand for, broken down and distilled into a single car. Focused.

Take the alcantara steering wheel – devoid of all bar one button in the CSL, an

unmarked on/off that activated M Track mode and loosened the stability control's embrace. In the regular M3, the steering wheel had more buttons – there was even one to answer your phone.

The steering wheel itself linked beautifully to the front wheels, via a rack with a faster ratio, and made it feel more alive at lower speeds. The CSL sounded better thanks to the incredible roar of induction noise and the metallic rasp from the thin-walled exhaust, while the balance of the chassis and its central pivot point meant that here was a car that felt right.

Even the SMG automated manual gear-

box didn't feel off the pace, if you judged it correctly and let it aggressively bang through the ratios in manual mode.

All of a sudden the letters started to make sense. It was possible to trace the same brilliance of engineering that ran through cars like the F90 M5 CS back to this. There have been a few times recently when M has dropped the ball, giving cars special letters for no clear reason. Maybe that's why the CSL remains special: because its rightness keeps M honest, and shows up the rare missteps.

For that reason it'll be a forever car.

**PIERS WARD**







#### **M3 CSL (E46)**

The art of fine margins

**POWERTRAIN** 3246cc 24v straight-six, six-speed automated manual, rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 355bhp @ 7900rpm, 273lb ft @ 4900rpm, 4.9sec 0-62mph, 155mph

**LEGACY** The CS and CSL badges still signal greatness



E90 (2004-2013)

# POWER FOR THE PEOPLE

It's a picture that's long stuck with me: we were standing in a damp car park outside a grotty hotel in Wales waiting for the latest 3-series variant to turn up for a road test. The weather was foul – drizzle and the sort of light levels that make you want to mainline vitamin D – and the location dreary.

But suddenly two headlights pierced the gloom as my then boss arrived. The new BMW 335i was with us. It honestly felt like Iron Man had just turned up to save humanity, such was the way the excitement levels notched up.

The contrast to everything else available at the time marked the E90 out, particularly the 335i: here was a family saloon with a twin-turbo, 302bhp engine that didn't look ostentatious in the 'burbs but could transform itself at the weekend. The full 295lb ft of torque was available from just 1300rpm, comfortably outstripping a Ferrari 360 for twist.

I have absolutely no recollection of the other cars on the test: they must have been an Audi and a Mercedes, but I couldn't tell you a single distinguishing feature about either. In the BMW, even tiny details are sprinkled like stars in my memory: the gearchange (a manual was still available and had BMW's typically rubbery and long-ish throw); the shape of the seats; the ease of that iDrive generation.

The E90 was the first 3-series to get BMW's excellent control system; in the facelift, it was a hard-drive set-up that

meant you could store the contents of over 100 CDs on the system. A hundred!

Various engines were available in the E90, from a 318i for under £20k to the M Sport 335i. Five diesels were also on BMW's books, including the stupendous 330d and 335d that both offered the sort of zero-effort torque that electric cars have now made their own.

Choice was everywhere: along with all the engines and gearboxes, you could get four different body styles. Company-car drivers had never had it so good. The sensible money at the time went on a six-speed 320d Touring, but it's the 335i that gets people dewy-eyed now.

It was a generational shift for BMW, who up until this point had largely swerved turbos. Engine guru Theodore Melcher decided against a V8 (too heavy) and the existing 3.0-litre six-cylinder couldn't be reamed out much further, so a turbo it had to be to move the conversation on from the

excellent naturally-aspirated 330i.

Two small turbos were used, each covering three cylinders, and direct injection improved fuel efficiency by around 10 per cent. The result was an engine that thought it was much bigger than it was, with rabid torque and instant throttle response unheard of at the time, at least outside of the Porsche 911 Turbo's variable-vane tech.

It meant the 335i effortlessly bridged the gap between the 330i and the E46 M3 (then making 338bhp), and gave the regular 3-series a whiff of stardust – a sense that there was a link to the M stratosphere that mortals were more likely to attain. It was the ultimate saloon blend of sport and luxury.

PIERS WARD







### **335i (E90)**

Bridging the gap to the M3

**POWERTRAIN** 2979cc 24v  
twin-turbocharged straight-six,  
six-speed manual or six-speed  
automatic, rear-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 302bhp @  
5800rpm, 295lb ft @ 1300rpm,  
5.5sec 0-62mph, 155mph

**LEGACY** Massive uptick in quality,  
refinement and speed







# TREAD CAREFULLY

With no engine to spoil the serenity,  
an electric G-Class goes in search of a  
more tranquil future

Words Piers Ward Photography Olgun Kordal







# A

s the electric Mercedes G-Class creeps around a corner in Kielder Forest, all I can think of is the opening scene from *Gladiator*. We've been driving for two hours through pristine forest, surrounded by pine trees stood ramrod straight, only to emerge into an apocalyptic scene that feels like it should have Russell Crowe taking on the hordes of Visigoths.

The swirling mist reveals carnage: massive ruts carved into the earth by the unseen forces of the harvesters and forwarders; trees toppled with their splintered trunks shouting in silent agony at the violence of the chainsaw; huge roots upended and exposed, lying naked for all the world to see; countless tree stumps littering the clearing, a mournful reminder of what once stood here.

Gone are the gentle sounds of the forest, replaced by an eerie silence. Nothing moves. If ever there was a metaphor for what mass transportation in petrol and diesel cars has done for the planet...

Could electrification help? Just as the Forestry Commission has already started to plant the saplings to replace the trees it's felled, so the electric G poses a question as it emerges from the forest, cleanly and near-silently meandering along the tracks of Kielder, England's largest forest, nestled just south of the border with Scotland.

Formally called the Mercedes-Benz G580 with EQ Technology (a level of verbosity impressive even for Merc), the EQG is not the most obvious answer to electrifying the world's remote areas. Weighing in at 3.2 tonnes – a figure so high that the car can't even be fitted with a roof rack for fear of pushing it over the maximum permitted gross vehicle weight – it costs over £180,000, has thick carpets instead of rubber mats and is unlikely to be top of any sheep farmer's wish list. There are no ker-clunk mechanical levers, replaced by digital screens,

soft mood lighting and beautifully finished air vents.

And yet... Mercedes has chosen to equip the car with enough off-road hardware to ensure it should be able to tackle just as much tricky terrain as its combustion siblings. Four electric motors, each attached directly to the chassis and connected to the wheels via dual-joint shafts, provide a total of 579bhp and an incredible 859lb ft (a Defender V8 has 518bhp and 461lb ft), while it still rides on the old-school ladder-frame chassis (albeit modified), with double-wishbone suspension up front and a rigid axle at the rear.

Wading depth is up from 700mm in the combustion G to 850mm in the electric and ground clearance is 250mm, which is fine but 40mm short of what the Defender can manage. There are no diff locks but Mercedes argues they're not needed as, via the medium of torque vectoring, the four motors can do the same job. It does, though, have a low-range mode thanks to a two-speed gearbox; each motor has its own transmission so can be independently controlled.

There are a few different drive modes but the ones we're concerned with are Trail and Rock. In the latter, you have to confirm your selection with a second button press, whereupon it turns off ESP and allows you to select low-range gearing. It's also the mode you need for G-Turn (spinning around within its own length) and G-Steer (enhanced ability in tight bends). The electric G is definitively not a cat-walk model – it might have a 21st century powertrain but the ethos remains faithful to the 1979 original.

We start our trip on-road, zigzagging along the Scottish border, spectacular vistas whichever way we look. I am a little surprised there isn't more oomph from the electric G, given the figures – it's fast, but not as fast as many EVs – and it doesn't rock back like a ►

**Weighing in at 3.2 tonnes, it costs over £180,000 and is unlikely to be top of any sheep farmer's wish list**







Schöffel gilet  
practically a  
uniform out here



Who said water  
and electricity  
don't mix?







**The electric G isn't a catwalk model – it might have a 21st century powertrain but it remains faithful to the original**





**Scattered wheelie bins dot the roadside every mile or so, hinting at what must be a hellish paper round**



Whole G line-up  
now has those  
lights, EV or not



cartoon dragster thanks to the adaptive dampers. It definitely feels more akin to a diesel Defender than the muscular AMG version of the G-Class, despite what the G580's 0-62mph time tells you.

On tarmac, you can feel the limitations of the chassis. It's incredibly smooth at 40-60mph but at lower speeds the suspension can feel a bit lumpy – you sense the sheer weight of the car overwhelming the damping. A Defender has a broader operating range.

We carve through valleys into narrower and narrower roads, mossy walls and remote houses lining our route. Scattered wheelie bins dot the roadside once every mile or so, hinting at what must be a hellish paper round.

Then it's welly time. Past an old Roman settlement and into Deer Street – maintained by local farmers and the council, it's technically a road, but we're not expecting to meet much traffic on this grassy track. Jagged rocks are strewn across the path like a giant's game of boules, while deep ruts will test the G's ground clearance.

There's also a lot of water up here. Recent snow melt won't have helped and the mud squelches softly beneath every footstep. Time for the Merc to face its first big test. The G is on reasonable rubber – Falken Wildpeak all-terrains – but a wet grassy hill can be the nemesis of any off-roader, which will struggle to overcome the combination of zero grip and unhelpful gravity. ►

## WRC vs EQG



The 30-year gap between when the World Rally Championship last used Kielder Forest and today might make you think there would be a huge contrast between the technology of then and now. In reality, yes and no. In fact, the Subaru Imprezas and Mitsubishi Evos of that era ran trick differentials, fully active affairs that would rival the complexity of the EQG's electric set-up. By constantly monitoring the throttle and steering angle, the rally car's brain could work out how open or closed the diffs needed to be, giving more or less wheel slip. The permutations were near-endless and the stakes were high: one wrong move could ruin your rally.

The Merc doesn't suffer from the WRC's turbo restrictor plates (579bhp plays around 270bhp) and has all the torque available from Orpm, but the WRC cars used clever tech to make the most of their potential. Anti-lag systems passed air directly into the exhaust manifold, using the car's brain to work out precisely when to do so, avoiding turbo lag.

Then as now, engineers can always find a solution.



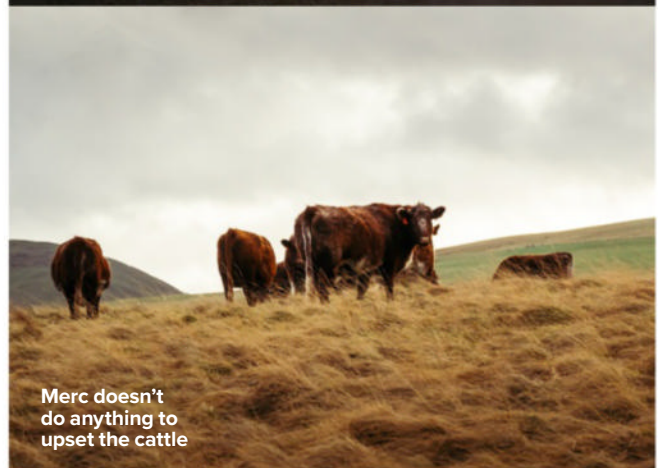
This must be the only G in the world on 18s



2025's most unusual gym routine



EQ brand's most extreme version yet



Merc doesn't do anything to upset the cattle





Wheel angle display handy on rough stuff



Breakover angle is a very handy 20°

Unlike the experience of jumping into a modern Land Rover and being greeted by myriad off-road modes and settings, the electric G is remarkably simple, almost worryingly so. We're a long way from everywhere – the sort of location where you typically expect to have to push a lot of buttons and pull several levers before attempting to tackle the terrain. But no. We meet grass, we drop the G into Trail mode, and that's it – we're on the move.

But just 500 yards later, Deer Street claims its latest victim. It's neither especially steep nor especially wet, but it's enough to make the G grind to a halt, tyres slipping over the sheen of mud. Bit more power. Nothing. Into reverse and back up a bit. Still nothing. Back further and try to get onto virgin grass, out of the slippery mud tracks we've been following. Now it slowly starts to creep forward. Increase the power levels to build the momentum to punch through where we previously got bogged down. Finally, we're over the crest.

More extreme tyres would have helped – the Falken Wildpeak comes in a mud-focused version with bigger gaps between the blocks – but Mercedes has fitted ours with the all-terrains, a better compromise between tarmac and mud, which makes perfect sense for a car that is unlikely to go this far off road very often.

It's also a lesson for the driver in the elusive art of reading a road. Trail mode felt correct at the start of the Street, but by the time we got stuck Rock would have been better, as it dials down the assistance systems. You can opt to turn ESP off in any mode, but we didn't, and realised too late that in Trail mode it's too domineering for these particular conditions. Incidentally, the electric G doesn't have conventional traction control because each wheel is always individually controlled by its dedicated e-motor.

Getting temporarily stuck on wet grass is not a failure – it's part and parcel of off-roading. It also illustrates one of the impressive as-

## Unlike jumping into a Land Rover and being greeted by myriad modes, the electric G is remarkably simple



pects of the electric G: how easy it is to modulate all the power. All the torque is available from zero rpm, so with a gentle right foot it's easy to creep forward. In a conventional combustion-engined 4x4, you're fighting turbo lag and the overriding inefficiencies of the powertrain, but in the G580 it's simple to ease along with plenty in reserve. It's an effortless car to adjust to, not requiring as much mental capacity as a more traditional SUV.

And it's quiet, letting you hear the wind rustling the trees. We meet a dog walker along Deer Street and enjoy the way we can have a very civilised conversation without first needing to kill the engine. In fact his Patterdale terrier, desperately trying to break free from its lead, is making far more noise than the car.

The G makes a very calm companion as we head into Kielder Forest. It allows nature to breathe along with you and gives you a chance to deploy all your senses as you travel. Window down is the best way as wafts of pine scent drift into the cabin and the tyres gently scrunch along the forest track.

This place oozes life. Whereas walking in a grass field can feel largely one-dimensional and absent of life, a forest walk is totally different. It's an opportunity to hear all the substances – wood, moss, water, mud – compress under your feet. Water gently trickles down a gully next to the road. Even the light is more natural and softer. ►





Into the wilderness

Recent snow  
melt equals  
plenty of mud



Deer Street's wet  
grass deceptively  
tricky for any car



### MERCEDES-BENZ G580 WITH EQ TECHNOLOGY

**PRICE** £180,860 (Edition One,  
£180,860 as tested)

**POWERTRAIN** 116kWh battery, four  
e-motors, all-wheel drive

**PERFORMANCE** 579bhp, 859lb ft,  
4.7sec 0-62mph, 112mph

**WEIGHT** 3209kg

**EFFICIENCY** 2.0-2.2 miles per kWh  
(official), 1.5 miles per kWh (tested), 283-mile  
electric range (official), 174-mile electric  
range (tested), 0g/km CO2

**ON SALE** Now

★★★★☆







Boot isn't vast,  
but big enough  
for a camping  
weekend

In the electric G, you miss none of this. It's an absorption chamber. We need to test its off-road credentials more. After the calm of winding through woods, time to G-Turn. You may well have seen videos demonstrating this feature, where an electric G spins amusingly and entirely pointlessly within its own axis.

The more serious bit of tech is G-Steer, which allows the car to tackle much tighter corners than would normally be possible, but G-Turn is the fun one. You just engage Rock mode, low range, hit the button on the dash, pull one of the paddleshifters, depending which way you'd like to spin, and hit the throttle. Why is this so easy to do, yet switching off the speed-warning bong is buried in sub-menus?

Two G-Turns later and the car is nearly buried up to its axles: the ground clearance is not its strong point. Mercedes claims the battery is well protected, with a multi-material mix of underbody guards (including carbonfibre, to trim vital kilos off the kerbweight), but it still gnaws away at my mechanical sympathies as the odd rock catches the underside.

Endurance is also lacking. We're averaging comfortably less than two miles per kWh in the forest, so we have to head back to the road

## Why is it so easy to execute a G-Turn, yet switching off the speed-warning bong is buried in multiple sub-menus?



in search of the nearest charge point, which turns out not to be very near at all. When we eventually locate one 45 minutes away, the G takes on electrons at over 150kW, but it's a painful waste of time that you wouldn't get in a combustion car.

We return to the forest and drive deeper in, along tracks that are clearly less well-used. Trees have self-seeded, and without the logging lorries to keep them pegged back they threaten to engulf the track in places. The forest gets darker and feels much more remote – we startle the occasional feral goat that is obviously more used to hearing vehicles coming.

As the light fades, a fallen tree blocks our path. Hang on. An opportunity to use G-Turn in an actual real-world situation. Will social media ever recover? I twitch with anticipation – this could be our moment, electric G. Finger poised over the button, I'm ready to execute the move. But then a helpful onlooker ruins it by producing a hand saw and simply hacking the tree out of the way. Deflated, we push on.

We drive through another clearing and onto our overnight camping spot. The wind has picked up and is now rocking the tops of the pine trees, setting up a chorus of creaks and whispers.

It's pitch black when we arrive. Tent pitched, chilli con carne bubbling on the gas stove, it's a chance to ponder the electric G. Hunkered down against the cold, front half of me toasty from the fire, back half bearing the brunt of this northern January night, the G stands silently nearby.

It's a remarkable effort from Mercedes. There must have been easier routes to making this thing, short cuts that could have been taken, but the engineers ignored them all. Despite all the mechanical differences, it's on brand – even the doors slam with the same solidity.

There are flaws. The price is ridiculous and the weight really rams home the limitations of batteries as an energy store, but as an object to absorb nature in every sense while also being cocooned in warmth, nothing gets close. It's a glimpse of a calmer future. **car**



# Our cars

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HELLO LAND ROVER DEFENDER + ELECTRIC MINI TWO WAYS  
+ VW & BYD HEAD TO HEAD + GOODBYE SUZUKI SWIFT





# Bridging the gap

Tesla's hegemony is over: both Europe and China now make some cracking mid-sized EVs. By **Tim Pollard**

## The story so far

The ID. 7 is an accomplished act. It needs to be, with Chinese competition this fierce

+ VW is comfier, classier than Seal – and roomier, too

- Design is more conservative and sober-suited than BYD

## Logbook

**Price** £51,550 (£55,270 as tested)

**Performance** 77kWh battery, e-motor, 282bhp, 6.5sec 0-62mph, 112mph **Efficiency** 4.7 miles per kWh (official), 3.2 miles per kWh (tested), 0g/km CO2

**Range** 383 miles (official), 244 miles (tested) **Energy cost** 9.4p per mile **Miles this month** 789

**Total miles** 5197

Just how much of a threat to the established order are electric cars from China? It looks as though the balance of power is tipping inexorably towards the new brands from the Far East, after decades of strategic investment. But is the rise of the Chinese EV still a work in progress, or have we already reached the tipping point?

To assess the state of play, we gathered two electric saloons from the CAR long-term test fleet: our VW ID. 7 and BYD Seal – close rivals cut from similar cloth, if not precisely the same aisle of the tailor's shop.

Both have a fastback profile but, at 4.9 metres long, the VW stretches 166mm beyond the BYD, explaining the more generous 532-litre boot accessed by a tailgate, compared with the Seal's 400-litre loadbay. Their batteries have similar capacities (77kWh plays 82kWh) and they sell at similar prices; the Seal

range starts at £47k, the ID. 7 at £51k. You'd be wise to consider either car if you're feeling more than a little fed up of Elon Musk's leadership and want to dodge Tesla.

If you've been following our long-term test you'll know we admire the ID. 7 very much. It's arguably the most mature iteration yet of the ID family. That polish, the result of continuous improvement, percolates through every facet.

It does everyday life so well that we're left nitpicking, really. Perhaps our biggest criticism is that it's just a little bit dull – the epithet so often applied to an all-rounder that's polished out any character.

The BYD Seal is run by deputy news editor Jake Groves, who's found it to be rapid, capable and generously equipped. I'm inclined to agree. The Chinese saloon is crisply designed and attractive to these eyes, stopping short of over-gimmickry with its aquatic gills and styling flourishes. Step inside and the cabin is a little snuggler than the ID. 7's but it's jolly well made and there are few complaints about materials or fit and finish. I'd judge the Wolfsburg cabin ahead on quality, but not by much.

There's a whole new infotainment system to learn and I agree with Jake that the spinning touchscreen, which lets you choose from portrait or landscape orientation, is little more than a trinket. You'll likely pick the layout that works ►

Tim's ID. 7 leads Jake's Seal, by a nose

Rich Pearce





You'll spin the touchscreen once and then leave it locked forever more

for you and leave it at that.

Aside from that nice party trick, the rest of the Seal's switchgear and instruments are traditional. It's an easy car to jump in and drive.

The Seal's cabin is bathed in daylight, thanks to the full-length fixed glass roof on our entry-level Design-spec model. The rear of the cabin is much more spacious than I was expecting from the swooping exterior style. The rear floor is entirely flat and there's plenty of room for a six-footer to sit behind a driver of similar stature.

It feels airier in the back than the rather dour, sensible ID. 7, too. The only black mark for practicality is the lack of space under the front seats for rear occupants' feet. The BYD proffers pop-out door handles whereas the VW has recessed electro-touchpads; neither solution is perfect for longevity, in my view, and I prefer the fixed grab handles deployed by Ford on the Capri, which uses Volkswagen underpinnings.

Once you're in, the Chinese car needs a prod of the start button whereas the German rival requires no 'ignition' moment: simply jump in, twist the gear selector and drive away. It's all very straightforward.

Within moments of setting off, it's apparent that the Seal's brakes are massively over-assisted. It's a dynamic shortcoming that stands out a mile in an otherwise very accomplished package. The first dab of the anchors unleashed much grabbier braking than I'd like. It's a shame, as the rest of the BYD driving experience is calm and sophisticated.

In Sport mode, it feels quicker than the ID. 7 (borne out in 0-62mph figures: 6.3sec plays 5.7sec) and yet it can lope along in Normal with a relaxed gait and a comforting ride.

The pair have differing driving characteristics. The Seal, despite its bulbous looks, feels agile and nimble; it's more playful than the VW, which is at its best going about its business in

## The pair have differing driving characteristics. The Seal feels agile, nimble and more playful

an unassuming, under-the-radar and calm fashion. Despite being half a size bigger, the VW is just 50kg heavier – but its more sober character might explain why I'm averaging 3.2 miles per kilowatt hour to Jake's friskier 2.7.

So it's honours even in this

test. China's most serious rival to the established European old guard is right up there. We can no longer say 'at first attempt' – all brands are pioneering in this alien, electrified future. It's virgin territory and the stakes couldn't be higher for first-mover competitive advantage.



Bored of the Tesla Model 3? Seal and ID. 7 worth a look



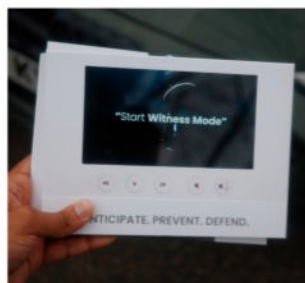


## The cost of progress

The first thing I do after starting the i5 is flick two fingers at its central screen. It's not what you're thinking. This shortcut hand gesture brings up the menu to deactivate the speed-limit and lane-departure warnings. It's now second nature to me, but first-time passengers are lost for words. I can also twirl my left hand to raise or lower the volume of the excellent Bowers & Wilkins audio system. Or thumb the faceted glass roller on the centre console. Or press the buttons on the steering wheel.

The costly tech used by this complex and redundant system boggles my mind. My inner cynic believes it's there to justify a brand's premium status – and hefty monthly repayments – rather than actually benefit the driving and ownership experience. Tell me I'm wrong.

**BEN WHITWORTH**



## Caught in 4K if they return

This month I've been running around in Britain's second most popular EV, the Audi Q4 e-Tron. It's perfectly fine, offering a premium interior with a feasible range, anonymous styling and decent dynamics. However, after the shot of adrenaline that was the S3, the e-Tron feels like a pint of Night Nurse. (The car that outsells it, the Tesla Model Y, is also no dynamic livewire.)

While I wait to get my S3 back, I've secured a dashcam to ensure I'm never again the victim of a lousy hit-and-run, or at least it should help identify the offender. It's a top-notch Nextbase iQ 4K system that records the front and rear of the car – but also uses radar to capture incidents when you're parked. Next time they'll be caught in 4K... if, that is, I get time to fit it, complete with its menacing-sounding Witness Mode.

**CURTIS MOLDRICH**



## The door catch

There are couple of weird situations you find yourself in, driving an MX-30. First, when you pull up kerbside to let someone out of the back seat and you realise they can't open the back door until you've opened the front door first. But when they open theirs, you realise your front seatbelt is actually attached to the rear door – and it's now pulled so tight across your face you could hang your washing on it.

Then there's the car park trap: you open your driver's door and climb out, then you open the rear suicide door to let your kids out, then you see that you're trapped in this little door-pen, between the Mazda and the car next to you. The tighter the parking space the worse it is. I'm wondering if Mazda shouldn't offer an optional escape hatch in the roof.

**MARK WALTON**



## Keeping it Eco... mostly

The settings I've defaulted to in the Seal are normal regen (which acts just like engine braking) in combination with Eco drive mode. It's smooth and helps discourage my lead-footed tendencies.

I've kept it in Eco so much that even flicking to Standard for an extra burst of energy for overtaking feels hilariously fast. And this is the less powerful Seal; on full throttle my old blue one felt like I'd activated hyperdrive.

These forays into Standard may explain the dip in efficiency. That and lots of long-distance drives have harmed the economy figures this month, not helped by my preference for not using cruise control. The running costs have gone up, too, because I've been using public chargers so much. Whoops...

**JAKE GROVES**

### BMW i5 Month 6

#### The story so far

Novelty's worn off; we're now appreciating the EV's all-round 5-ishness

- + Plenty of typically BMW dynamism to be found here...
- ...but often upstaged by pointless and expensive tech

#### Logbook

**Price** £78,450 (£94,995 as tested) **Performance** 81.2kWh battery, e-motor, 340bhp, 6.1sec 0-62mph, 120mph **Efficiency** 3.7 miles per kWh (official), 2.6 miles per kWh (tested) **Range** 301 miles (official), 263 miles (tested) **Energy cost** 3.3p per mile **Miles this month** 1576 **Total miles** 7184

### Audi S3 Month 4

#### The story so far

Q4 doing a good job of subbing while the S3 is repaired after an altercation at an airport

- + Understated looks; decent range, interior quality
- It's no S3 in the dynamics department

#### Logbook (S3)

**Price** £47,490 (£51,135 as tested) **Performance** 1984cc turbocharged four-cylinder, 328bhp, 4.7sec 0-62mph, 155mph **Efficiency** 34.4mpg (official), 17.4mpg (tested), 188g/km CO2 **Energy cost** 27.0p per mile **Miles this month** 296 **Total miles** 1707

### Mazda MX-30 Month 2

#### The story so far

The so-called Freestyle pillarless doors lead to some unforeseen situations

- + The doors are like something from a concept car
- That's a polite way of saying they're completely impractical

#### Logbook

**Price** £33,495 (£35,295 as tested) **Performance** 17.8kWh battery, e-motor plus 830cc rotary range extender, 168bhp, 9.1sec 0-62mph, 87mph **Efficiency** 37.2mpg (official), 28.5mpg (tested), 21g/km CO2 **Energy cost** 22.1p per mile **Miles this month** 1103 **Total miles** 5175

### BYD Seal Month 5

#### The story so far

Our BYD lives in Eco mode... most of the time

- + Still quick, even if this is the 'slow' Seal; refined at speed
- I'm killing the efficiency with loads of fast motorway runs

#### Logbook

**Price** £45,695 (£46,571 as tested) **Performance** 82.5kWh battery, e-motor, 308bhp, 5.9sec 0-62mph, 112mph **Efficiency** 3.4 miles per kWh (official), 2.66 miles per kWh (tested) **Range** 354 miles (official), 342 miles (tested) **Energy cost** 21.4p per mile **Miles this month** 1238 **Total miles** 2420



MINI COOPER SE MONTH 5

Alternative  
reality

# Which is the true Mini EV?

When the factory electric Mini meets an exquisite reboot of the original, not everything is as it seems. By **Piers Ward**

## The story so far

Old looks, modern powertrain

+ Cold weather makes heated seats and wheel welcome

- That same weather makes the efficiency plummet

## Logbook

**Price** £34,500 (£39,799 as tested)

**Performance** 49kWh battery, e-motor, 215bhp,

6.7sec 0-62mph, 106mph

**Efficiency** 4.2-4.4 miles per kWh (official), 3.5 miles per kWh (tested)

**Range** 240-249 miles (official), 171 miles (tested)

**Energy cost** 7.0p per mile

**Miles this month** 919 **Total miles** 5835

Idiotic question alert. When do you cease to notice a car no longer has an engine? I've spent over 20 years driving Minis, where the noise and character from the four-cylinder lump up front was part of the driving experience, supplemented nicely by the whine from the steering rack in early BMW-era cars.

Contrast that with my long-term-test Cooper SE, a car that has all the stance and attitude of those cars, only this time without an engine.

The BMC and BMW eras all used to gel into one neat package – the nose-on steering attitude that fed into the torque steer and a sense you were constantly operating at the edge of traction even in the lower-powered cars. This made me nervous about the electric version.

But I needn't have been. Maybe it's laziness on my part, but the way an electric car makes most aspects of driving

so damn simple means they become hard to resist. Most of my journeys have been short so even the car's unexceptional range hasn't been a hindrance. Although, that said, the efficiency went through the floor during January's cold snap: my figures from that time show several periods when I was getting worse than 3.0 miles per kWh and one as low as 2.5. Even with a charger at home, in that weather I rarely let the Mini get below 30 per cent because the distance available from a third of a battery was so paltry.

So it's convenient, mostly. But appealing as well? Getting there. The engineering set-up of some EVs is becoming so clever that they are starting to feel less like white goods. It's a different job replacing a screaming V12, but at this end of the scale the loss of a droning four-cylinder engine isn't as keenly felt. The Cooper SE has an attitude, a sense of joy, that means it's no Nissan Leaf.

But worthy of the heritage? Any Mini will aim to exploit this heritage to make sure it stands out against the newest rivals. But if it doesn't feel like there's a genuine link to the 66 years of Minis that have gone before, the use of the badge seems superficial. Then again, if a 2025 car feels held back by tradition, buyers will switch to cars that make more effective use of current know-how.

Interesting light is shed on all this by the original-looking Mini you see alongside my ►



Jordan Butters





Original was  
a masterpiece  
of packaging.  
New one's... big





Think the new Mini's dash is fancy? Then check this out



BMW does like a chunky steering wheel

car. Crafted by David Brown Automotive, it harks back to a time when everything in the world seemed a lot smaller and simpler. Called the David Brown Automotive eMastered for the same legal reasons that stop a Singer being a Porsche, the 'old' car shows that dropping a simple e-motor into something ancient and small can work, albeit expensively.

David Brown isn't the first to do this – Mini itself even fired up a pilot project a few years ago, whereby customers could take their classic Mini back to Oxford for it to be officially converted to an EV. (The scheme still exists, but no longer under the BMW umbrella.) But compared to most, Silverstone-based David Brown Automotive is making quite a name for itself.

With the eMastered, it's less about re-use and more about starting again. DBA does use a donor car but fits a new shell,

new front subframe and EV powertrain, while not drilling any new holes in the body and retaining the steering and suspension. The charge port is in what was the fuel filler.

The retention of certain old parts is crucial because it means the company can claim the car is still the original – which means, according to the rules of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, it doesn't have to run a Q-plate. When you're paying the sort of money one of these DBA models commands – a staggering £150,000 – you don't want your well-heeled neighbours thinking you bought a kit car.

An inverter sits in a gap between the boot and cabin, the electric motor goes under the bonnet and an 18.8kWh battery is also stashed in the same spot. The power is well down on my Mini (97bhp vs 215bhp) but because the eMastered is a mere slip of a thing at just 640kg it's

## The Cooper SE doesn't have the old car's refined ride but it does have a liking for torque steer

not actually that much slower.

Both feel quick without being ludicrous, edgy without being hard work. This is where you can feel the rigour of BMW's engineers, because there really is a continuity of character between the two.

The newer car just has fewer foibles. The eMastered is great fun, with brilliantly sharp steering that almost thinks its way around a corner, but it also loves a camber, following it across the tarmac like a bloodhound. You picture yourself as a '60s racer, all arms and elbows fighting the thin-rimmed steering wheel and leaning into an apex at ridiculous angles.

Throttle response is fine at speed but there's none of the instant hit you expect with an EV from a standstill – it takes its time to get worked up. The seats are new and much thicker so you can forget any ideas that this particular old Mini is suitable for four people, not helped by the fact that the seat feels like it's pushed slightly further back compared to the BMC original. You end up with long arms and scrunched legs.

The Cooper SE doesn't have the old car's refined ride but it does have a liking for torque steer that keeps things interesting even in the dry, but it's easier to modulate everything than in

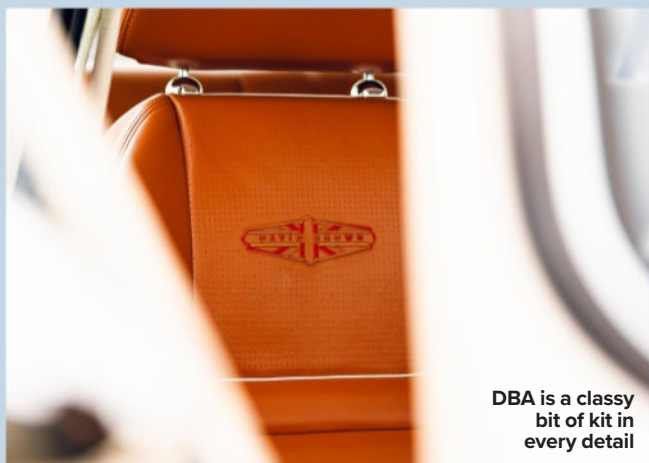
the eMastered. The essence of the old is there in the Cooper SE, but smoother and more manageable. And so it should be, given that there has been 60-odd years of development.

What's more, it doesn't feel like a fraud – the Cooper SE is by no means perfect but it does at least feel like a Mini.

When you approach the 2025 SE, you're aware that it's bigger than the original, but the proportions are largely the same. Similarly, inside it's recognisably related. And the driving experience definitely has many similarities. Whereas Volkswagen never made the Beetle work in the 21st century, BMW has managed it.

It's easy to be negative about the transition to EV, but there are plenty of positives – not least the running costs, if you're smart about it. I've recently rejigged my home energy tariff and switched to Eon Next Drive, which involves the rate between midnight and 7am dropping to 6.4p per kWh.

The Cooper SE's small battery means I can charge it from zero to 100 per cent full for around £3. (I say around, because the 7kW charger isn't fast enough to do the entire battery on the cheap overnight rate.) Getting 180 miles for £3 feels a lot like progress.



DBA is a classy bit of kit in every detail





No tailpipes for either; Minis were never really about the engines



New dwarfs old, but proportions are much the same



# Half a mill and a forged passport

Chances are I won't drop everything for a nomadic existence in this Defender. But the point is I could. By **Ben Miller**

## The story so far

The biggest Defender with the supercharged engine, here to try to prove that more is more

+ Special Forces style; syrupy power; gorgeous cabin

- Some aircraft carriers are easier to park – and less thirsty

## Logbook

**Price** £118,235 (£126,310 as tested) **Performance** 4999cc supercharged V8, 493bhp, 5.7sec 0-62mph, 149mph

**Efficiency** 19.7mpg (official), 18.7mpg (tested), 324g/km

**CO2 Energy cost** 32.0p per mile **Miles this month** 348

**Total miles** 1314

The writer who made me want to be a writer, Dan Walsh, once wrote that you didn't necessarily have to leave everything behind and ride around the world, as he did, to feel free. A motorcycle in your possession was enough. It was *the potential* to go – or, as Dan put it: 'A bike is a Beretta, half a mill in cash and a forged passport hidden under the floorboards. It's an escape route.'

All of which must make the V8 supercharged Defender 130 several mill in cash and a wad of forged passports so thick you'll never get that floorboard back down. It oozes the potential to go, its go-anywhere versatility hitting your central nervous system and flooding your mind with impossible dreams: dreams of living out of the

thing through the European summer, picking fruit and snoozing in hammocks in cool pine forests through the heat of the day; of trundling through the deserts of North Africa, charting the stars like an Elizabethan navigator sailing oceans of sand; of picking your way through the Himalayas, your eyes red and your lips chapped with the concentration and the fierce high-altitude sunshine.

It's these daydreams of course, together with that all-important elevated driving position, that saw the crossover/SUV/4x4 kill the MPV. But where an XC40 only hints at adventure, secretly praying you never do a Dan, the Defender broods, counting down the days until it can engage low range, pull itself up to full height on its air suspension and pit itself against the kind of terrain usually traversed only by the wind.

And now 'my' Defender is here, sitting on the driveway, studiously ignoring my home-charging wallbox and wondering why all I seem to do with it is put a cabin bag on the back seats and drive to Heathrow. It's a magnificent-looking machine; vast, purposeful like a freight locomotive and, it must be said, pretty much the antithesis of the Defender I always wanted. Back when the car was unveiled to the world, CAR ►



Like it owns the place









Extra length is aft of the rear axle, clearly



Good old mechanical anti-roll bars



## In the back somewhere, Matthew McConaughey in a spacesuit yelling at me to let him out

shot it for the October 2019 issue. That car was a 90 in green, with a white roof and white steel wheels.

This 130 is different. Where the 90 of my dreams is almost humble (particularly with diesel power, for 500 miles between fill-ups and do-able running costs), and compromised in practical terms by its single pair of doors and tiny boot, the three-row V8 130 is none of these things. Up front, the 5.0-litre V8, massively muted compared with the bombast of, say, the old F-Type R, brings with it the promise of silken performance and 19mpg. Out back, the cabin just goes on for-

ever, like a Dali-esque distortion of reality – all seats and space and seats and space and, back there somewhere I'm sure, Matthew McConaughey in a spacesuit yelling at me to let him out.

Launched in 2022, the 130 can be ordered with five, seven or eight seats. The entry-level X-Dynamic SE with the gorgeous D350 engine costs from £81,585 and gives you two options: five seats and a vast boot or two rows of three back seats. But from X-Dynamic HSE upwards, seven seats with captain's chairs in the second row becomes an option.

The V8, priced from £118,235,

is effectively its own trim level, with 22-inch wheels, privacy glass and quad exhaust pipes. Remarkably for a 2.6-tonne truck it also gives you a 5.7sec 0-62mph time. Options to nudge our Carpathian Grey example to £126,310 include upgraded captain's chairs (arm-

rests with cupholders, plus seat heating and cooling), paint protection film (to give the paintwork a hope in hell on narrow, hedge-lined UK lanes) and a detachable towbar.

All set, then. Now to just sell the house, hand in my notice and go. See you on the road.



Utility plus luxury equals no little greatness





SUZUKI SWIFT MONTH 7

Goodbye

# Uneven performance

Suzuki's supermini has proved frugal, spacious and perfectly reliable. If only it could cope better with poor road surfaces. By **Ben Barry**

Rich Pearce

## The story so far

Suzuki's supermini struggling to stand out

+ Roomy and well equipped

- Some cheap-feeling materials; ride quality depends on surface

## Logbook

**Price** £19,799 (£19,799 as tested)

**Performance** 1197cc turbocharged three-cylinder, 81bhp, 12.5sec 0-62mph, 103mph **Efficiency** 64.2mpg (official), 55.0mpg (tested), 99g/km CO2 **Energy cost** 11.0p per mile **Miles this month** 1188 **Total miles** 9990

After six months and 10,000 trouble-free miles, it's time to say farewell to our Suzuki Swift. I'll admit that as a rural dad of two teenagers in the taxi-driver phase of life, I wasn't relishing a 3.8-metre-long supermini, but the Swift proved so spacious inside that it's mostly worked just fine. There's enough room in the back, a boot that held four carry-on

bags when we went on holiday and comfortable seats too.

Some of the Swift's plastics are hard and cheap, but a decent roster of standard equipment helped make up for that. That's partly because ours was the Ultra model, the higher of two specs, which cost £19,799 and benefited from 16-inch alloys, auto air-con and electric folding mirrors, but even the £18,699 Motion gets a nine-inch infotainment screen, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto and various driver-assistance systems.

Not all of the infotainment was entirely intuitive, but the fundamentals were sound. I liked being able to adjust the temperature and fan speed without looking, as they're operated via toggles, not swipes at the screen.

The Swift was spectacularly frugal. It helped that we went for the front-wheel-drive manual (a CVT auto and all-wheel

drive are available) but whichever drivetrain you choose, the 1.2-litre mild-hybrid triple will be under the bonnet.

It makes just 81bhp yet is perky enough in first and second gear. There's a slightly shunty feel to the throttle when you back off, though.

Quiet roads and modest power under my right foot meant I often drove the Swift hard, but even then I've averaged economy of 50mpg-plus. Matching the 64.2mpg official figure should be easy.

The drive itself was a mixed bag. I liked the mid-weighted, quick-witted steering, likewise its slick gearchanges, improved for this fourth generation. Weighing just under a tonne, this Swift is also quite a fleet-footed car to chuck about, though its balance is neutral to understeery and the brake pedal alarmingly soft.

But I could never get past its

ride, which lacked isolation over secondary bumps and expansion joints. It thunked around town and it thunked on the motorway, even with tyre pressures dropped 10 per cent.

Midway through the Swift's time with us, I bobbled down to Heathrow, jumped on a plane to Rally Greece and hired a basic Skoda Fabia from Athens Airport, another supermini available for under £20k.

Not only did the Skoda drive pretty well, its ride was far better resolved than the Swift's, plus it was easy to switch off the lane-keep and speed-limit warnings – the latter infuriatingly difficult in the Suzuki.

There's much to recommend the Swift, but all things considered I'd go with the Skoda.

## Count the cost

**Cost new** £19,799 **Part exchange** £15,000 **Cost per mile** 11.0p **Cost per mile including depreciation** 59p



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| GK 776 £5700  | N12 JAK £1100 | E7 JUD £1300   | K80 KEV £1300 | W17 LES £1100 | J28 PAT £1400 |
| G19 JAK £1400 | N2 JLR £1200  | N99 KEV £1600  | A12 LEV £1500 | A21 MCA £1400 | PAT 95W £1300 |
| D21 JAK £1400 | JM 1808 £2900 | W8 KJH £1600   | 8720 LG £1600 | B21 MCA £1300 | 9214 PE £1600 |
| K26 ABE £1100 | E26 ABE £1100 | X6 MCC £1200   | 5173 PG £1200 | ROD 847 £1500 | PGW 23 £3500  |
| W16 ACE £1200 | K25 AST £1600 | F21 CAR £1500  | G22 CAR £1300 | D17 DEN £1600 | M26 DEN £1700 |
| A24 ACE £1400 | C25 ATY £1100 | M26 DEN £1700  | D25 2M £1700  | H9 DES £1400  | 88 DEW £1300  |
| C7 ACR £1100  | B24 ATY £1200 | R3 CAS £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | DEW 18Y £1900 | G1 DEY £1300  |
| T2 ADD £1400  | C24 ATY £1100 | A26 CAR £1600  | D24 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A9 ADD £1600  | K123 ATY £975 | R3 CAS £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| D26 ADM £1300 | MT AVE £1300  | H13 CAT £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| F26 ADM £1200 | C26 AVE £975  | A21 CAT £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C25 ADS £975  | D24 AVE £2200 | D21 CAT £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| Y15 ADY £1200 | G24 AVE £975  | E1 CAV £1800   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| D21 ADY £1300 | B21 BAB £975  | X3 CBM £1300   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| V26 ADY £1100 | C9 BAC £1200  | CEZ 13 £4700   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| E3 AGA £1300  | S7 BAN £1500  | C3 DIB £2600   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| H25 AIB £1400 | BB 1938 £3900 | N6 CIL £1200   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| G25 AIC £975  | D26 BBS £1300 | ON 541 £7500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| H18 AJM £1500 | K9 BEY £1500  | H21 CKY £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| B24 AJM £1200 | I00 BDN £1600 | A5 CLK £1200   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A24 AJS £1300 | D26 BEC £1300 | G26 CLO £1300  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| G26 AJS £1100 | E26 BEC £1100 | A21 CMC £1100  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C21 AJW £1300 | G26 BEC £1100 | L2 CND £975    | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| H25 AJW £1100 | AR BEK £1500  | 29 CMC £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| G26 AJW £1200 | D21 BEL £1500 | ON 541 £7500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| P1 AKM £1600  | A25 BEL £1600 | C21 COL £1700  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| N6 ALA £1500  | B26 BEL £1600 | G23 CON £1300  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| H24 ALA £975  | E26 BEL £1600 | C25 CON £1400  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| J60 ALF £1100 | S15 BEN £2700 | C26 CON £1400  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| X66 ALF £1100 | A24 BEN £2600 | E26 COX £1700  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| E23 ALX £975  | C26 BEN £2500 | HS COX £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A25 ANM £1500 | S9 BET £1500  | L16 COX £1400  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| H25 AMR £975  | A25 BET £975  | V21 COX £1300  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| J25 AMS £1300 | BEV 77 £3300  | C23 COX £1400  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A26 AMS £1400 | R19 BEV £1600 | D23 COX £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| B23 AMY £1700 | K24 BEV £975  | C4 CPH £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| H25 AMY £1800 | X44 BEV £1700 | 674 DA £3800   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| F21 ANA £1300 | BEV 915 £1600 | 6945 DA £1800  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| D21 AND £975  | E26 BEK £1100 | X1 DAD £2100   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A25 AND £1200 | G26 BEK £1100 | T2 DAD £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C19 ANG £1600 | 2900 BH £2300 | P4 DAL £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| L21 ANG £1500 | 841 BH £1900  | D21 DAL £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| D24 ANG £1500 | E1 BJM £1700  | X9 DAR £1500   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C21 ANH £1500 | X3 BJW £975   | G15 DAV £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| D13 ANN £3900 | L1 BMS £1900  | C24 DAV £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| R15 ANN £1900 | L15 BMW £1400 | A26 DAV £1200  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| P18 ANN £1400 | B21 BMW £1600 | A25 DAV £1400  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| G21 ANN £1600 | D21 BMW £1500 | D68 690 £975   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| L21 ANN £1500 | G19 BOB £1100 | DBL 678 £1700  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| D22 ANN £1700 | B21 BOB £1400 | T2 DCS £1300   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| V23 ANN £1500 | P21 BOB £975  | E3 DDD £1200   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C26 ANT £1200 | K24 BOB £975  | A21 DDY £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| F1 ARA £1300  | N9 BON £1200  | G21 DEB £1700  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| B21 ARA £1100 | D21 BON £975  | B23 DEB £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| G21 ARA £1100 | A26 BON £1100 | E23 DEB £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| G25 ARA £1900 | R1 BOR £1400  | C23 DEB £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A26 ARA £1900 | X8 BOT £1300  | A24 DEB £1500  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C21 ARB £975  | A25 BOT £975  | E21 DEE £1200  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| B26 ARB £1500 | 5522 BP £1900 | F21 DEE £1300  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C26 ARE £1200 | 743 BRC £1100 | C23 DEE £1300  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A24 ARR £1400 | BS 8063 £1700 | A24 DEE £1300  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| A24 ART £975  | BS 9787 £2200 | P1 DEK £1400   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| B25 ART £1300 | BS5 430 £1400 | A1 DEL £3300   | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C25 ARY £1500 | N7 BUB £1300  | D21 DEL £1200  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |
| C25 ASE £975  | D21 BUS £975  | B23 DEL £1200  | D21 CAT £1500 | S229 DF £1700 | DHE 706 £1500 |



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# GBU

## HOW DOES GBU WORK?

Our road testers rank the best cars currently on sale in 12 categories, and highlight the ones to buy

## The Good, the Bad & the Ugly: The Top 5s

### TOP 5 HOT HATCHES

You can pay a chunk more and still not get a better car



GIANT TEST WINNER



#### HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

**THE GOOD:** Feel, feedback, focus: a phenomenal full-sized hot hatch

**THE BAD:** Now £50,050 for a front-drive hatchback with barely any more power than before

**THE UGLY:** Probably the last of its kind; good job it's one of the best

**THE ONE TO BUY:** There's just the one model; £429 a month on a three-year PCP with a £10k deposit

GIANT TEST WINNER



#### TOYOTA GR YARIS

**THE GOOD:** A modern-day rally homologation special that's thrilling to drive

**THE BAD:** Road noise like a death-metal gig; joke rear seats

**THE UGLY:** Long waiting list, even with some versions priced at £60,000, although it starts at £44,250

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Now has optional auto but go for the manual

GIANT TEST WINNER



#### VW GOLF R

**THE GOOD:** Superb update makes this a seriously good and usefully quick all-rounder

**THE BAD:** Pity the Mk8 wasn't that already

**THE UGLY:** Still not quite there with the infotainment

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Estate is about £1.5k more than the hatch and more practical but not so sharp

GIANT TEST WINNER



#### AUDI RS3

**THE GOOD:** Want a five-cylinder hot hatch? Your option is RS3, with five or four doors

**THE BAD:** Now £60k; small boot for both

**THE UGLY:** RS is still better, but S3 does a lot for less money and is impressive in its own right

**THE ONE TO BUY:** £60,105 for the hatch; an extra grand for the saloon



#### VW GOLF GTI CLUBSPORT

**THE GOOD:** Rare mix of supreme comfort, hatchback versatility and cornering bite

**THE BAD:** The stats don't really shine in a 2025 context

**THE UGLY:** Mk8.5 a definite improvement, but interface still offers plenty to gripe about

**THE ONE TO BUY:** £42,155 for a very good Golf is pretty decent value



# TOP 5 SPORTS CARS



GTS has just beaten great rivals from AMG and Aston

GIANT TEST WINNER



## PORSCHE 911

**THE GOOD:** Exquisite blend of power, accuracy, excitement, style and usability, and new GTS integrates hybrid beautifully

**THE BAD:** You have to look down to #3 in this category to see the affordable performance Porsche; most basic 911 barely scrapes in at just under £100k

**THE UGLY:** It keeps getting bigger and heavier

**THE ONE TO BUY:** That basic Carrera is ace, and it's hard to imagine you'll regret it for a minute. But if you want more power and more trickery then Porsche has plenty of ways to take more of your money

GIANT TEST WINNER



## ARIEL ATOM

### THE GOOD:

A beautiful object as well as a thrilling drive; think of it as a modernised Lotus Seven crossed with a high-end sportsbike

**THE BAD:** You'll need bike-style wet-weather gear if it's raining. And at least £40k – this is an expensive toy, if a captivating one

**THE UGLY:** The 4R is even more bonkers

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Do you really need the 350bhp optional power upgrade?

GIANT TEST WINNER



## PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN/BOXSTER

### THE GOOD:

Sublime handling; surprising practicality

**THE BAD:** Less characterful than an Alpine; a boringly obvious choice (but not one bit boring to drive)

**THE UGLY:** Flat-four versions sound like a VW Beetle in a duet with Eeyore

**THE ONE TO BUY:** GT4 RS the most thrilling, Spyder is ace, but flat-six GTS 4.0 is a cut-price GT4 at around £75k

## LOTUS EMIRA

### THE GOOD:

The first new combustion Lotus in years is fantastically well resolved. Usable, desirable and thrilling

**THE BAD:** Harder work to live with than a Cayman

**THE UGLY:** The last petrol Lotus, at least for now – just as the firm gets the bucks to build on its brilliance

**THE ONE TO BUY:** AMG-sourced four is an interesting but pricey addition, but the Toyota 3.5-litre V6 suits it better

## ALPINE A110

### THE GOOD:

The perfectly formed antidote to a world of excess; a modern classic in every sense of the term

**THE BAD:** Two boots, neither big, and not much oddment storage inside

**THE UGLY:** 'R' is 34kg lighter – some effort – but also nearly £100k. Too much

**THE ONE TO BUY:** A110 S adds handling poise for £67,490 but £54,490 base A110 is all you need; enjoy it before it goes electric



## TOP 5 GRAND TOURERS



GIANT TEST WINNER

### FERRARI ROMA

#### THE GOOD:

Style, speed and sensuous lines; a car for, and from, a bygone age

**THE BAD:** An age in which we no longer live, tragically

**THE UGLY:** Baffling steering-wheel touchpads; strangled exhaust note

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

The cabrio. Arguably even more beautiful to look at from outside



### BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

**THE GOOD:** Luxury, power, agility and a great-looking body

**THE BAD:** Nope, it's really sorted

**THE UGLY:** Just because it's always been heavy and thirsty won't stop us complaining that it's heavy and thirsty

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

New plug-in range-topper is the most powerful Bentley ever, and so much more besides



GIANT TEST WINNER

### PORSCHE 911 TURBO

#### THE GOOD:

Hypercar-bothering pace, any road, any weather

**THE BAD:** Only fun when you're really going for it

**THE UGLY:** Turbo has never been good for depreciation; even less so recently

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Entry car plenty fast enough but £180,600 Turbo S outsells it; add £10k for a Convertible



EV CHOICE

### PORSCHE TAYCAN CROSS TURISMO

#### THE GOOD:

Raised ride height absolutely monsters lumpy UK roads

**THE BAD:** Not actually that practical

**THE UGLY:** Audi's e-Tron GT gets the nicer cockpit

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Revised version has arrived, along with revised prices: 4S Cross Turismo is now £100,400, and range hits £162k



### ASTON MARTIN DB12

#### THE GOOD:

Effortlessly beautiful DB11 replacement now has the traction to make the most of the rampant turbo V8's stomp. Excellent interior

**THE BAD:** Choosing between this and the Vanquish

**THE UGLY:** Aston simply doesn't do ugly

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Coupe is £185k; Volante the stunner

## TOP 5 COUPES AND CABRIOS



### BMW M2

#### THE GOOD:

The longitudinal-engined two-door BMW coupe lives

**THE BAD:** Bigger and heavier than we'd like but outrageous fun

#### THE UGLY:

You need £66k to get involved; steering can feel a shade rubbery

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Manual or auto transmission options – get the knob. We'd go M carbon seats, too



### MASERATI MC20

**THE GOOD:** A no-excuses excellent Maserati. Handling and ride to match the looks; a GT as well as a sports car

**THE BAD:** Throttle could be sharper in normal mode

#### THE UGLY:

Convincing your mates you did mean to buy the Maser and not the 296

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

The droptop Cielo. All the coupe's go with added style



### MERCEDES-AMG SL

**THE GOOD:** Latest SL is developed by AMG but it's still a cruiser, and all the better for it

**THE BAD:** Engines are still better than the ride and handling

#### THE UGLY:

Cabin designed by touchpad scattergun

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

The £148k, 469bhp SL55; also look at the coupe cousin, the AMG GT



### MAZDA MX-5

#### THE GOOD:

Closest thing to a modern-day Lotus Elan; genius folds-flat-in-seconds roof

**THE BAD:** Lashings of bodyroll; the 1.5 can't climb hills

**THE UGLY:** If you're over 6ft tall you simply won't fit

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Motorised-metal-roof RF doesn't quite make sense; 1.5 starts at £28k, punchier 2.0 from £32k with an LSD



### ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH

**THE GOOD:** Fast and comfortable, and utterly gorgeous

**THE BAD:** Gets very thirsty without too much provocation

**THE UGLY:** DB12 and Vantage are also very good

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

£333,000 will get you a very fine long, low, two-seat sports car/GT/near-supercar coupe



# TOP 5 SUPERCARS



**FERRARI 296 GTB**

**THE GOOD:** Timeless styling and a driving experience as good as any of Maranello's finest

**THE BAD:** You need reflexes like a fighter pilot to drive it as fast as it can go

**THE UGLY:** Touch-sensitive steering-wheel pads make the interface borderline unusable

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Fiorano pack is £25k+ overkill. GTS adds sunshine



**PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS**

**THE GOOD:** Spine-tlingling sound; 9000rpm redline; total immersion

**THE BAD:** Nothing to see here

**THE UGLY:** Getting on the waiting list is like winning both *The X Factor* and *The Apprentice*

**THE ONE TO BUY:** RS is somehow more focused than the GT3 but more road-compliant at the same time. How do they do it?



**LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO**

**THE GOOD:** The monstrous, naturally-aspirated V12 lives on – now e-boosted and wrapped in such a hard-to-crash package insurance should be a tenner. Vastly improved cabin, too

**THE BAD:** Price has skyrocketed

**THE UGLY:** EV-only range is six miles

**THE ONE TO BUY:** There is only one for now



**MCLAREN 750S**

**THE GOOD:** Lighter, more powerful, better: evolution of 720S is another corker from Woking

**THE BAD:** 30 per cent new but you'd struggle to tell

**THE UGLY:** Convincing your mates you actually bought the new car

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Stick to the comfort-spec seats and avoid the harnesses on the top 'super carbon' ones



**CHEVROLET CORVETTE Z06**

**THE GOOD:** A beautifully balanced performance package that can stand tall among the supercar aristocracy

**THE BAD:** Interior quality and kit not quite there

**THE UGLY:** Will future electrification kill the thrill?

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Add the Z07 pack for upgraded aero, suspension, brakes and wheels; expect to pay £140k

# TOP 5 PLUG-IN HYBRIDS



**BMW X5 50E**

**THE GOOD:** Massive 67-mile official e-range; horizon-eating performance

**THE BAD:** Hybrid hardware cuts into boot space to the tune of 150 litres; no seven-seat option

**THE UGLY:** Not much now that the facelifted 50e model with more e-range and power is here

**THE ONE TO BUY:** This one, for £82k; it will serve you well



**FORD KUGA**

**THE GOOD:** Facelift has brought better efficiency, and it still drives very well

**THE BAD:** Electric-only range isn't great, although fuel consumption's good

**THE UGLY:** Not so much ugly as dowdy, particularly the interior – not a patch on the electric Explorer

**THE ONE TO BUY:** PHEV in ST-Line X trim can be had for £42,455



**PORSCHE CAYENNE**

**THE GOOD:** Handling; driver focus; choice of body styles; 0-62mph in 5.0sec

**THE BAD:** Bigger battery for facelift model but still can't match the X5

**THE UGLY:** The front passenger touchscreen: £1000 and not needed

**THE ONE TO BUY:** If you value the U in SUV, avoid the coupe – even if it is a great steer



**VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN**

**THE GOOD:** Mk3 is bigger than ever but still a neat all-round package. Choice of 201 and 268bhp PHEVs, both with 62-mile e-range

**THE BAD:** Room for improvement with the infotainment

**THE UGLY:** People are buying Tiguan instead of Golfs, in huge numbers

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Go for either of the eHybrids in good-value Match trim



**BMW 330E**

**THE GOOD:** Goes sub-six to 62mph and up to 41 electric miles on a charge

**THE BAD:** Engine is slightly coarse; plain 330i is less heavy, more fun

**THE UGLY:** Hybrid kit eats into boot space so regular 3s are roomier

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Choice of saloon or estate. Handsome, vaguely affordable 330e Sport Touring is £48,785



# TOP 5 ELECTRIC CARS



GIANT  
TEST  
WINNER

1



## RENAULT 5 E-TECH

**THE GOOD:** The way it looks, the way it drives, the keen pricing – but it's also refreshingly practical, with five doors, a usable rear bench, and good efficiency, too

**THE BAD:** Fiddly gear selector stalk; no frunk

**THE UGLY:** What ugly? Look at it

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Entry point is £22,995 but we'd splash a few more grand on mid-spec Techno, which gets the '5' charging indicator on the bonnet and other desirable bits of kit, plus the option of the bigger battery, 52 rather than 40kWh

Alpine's take on the 5 has struggled to match its impact

GIANT  
TEST  
WINNER



## HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

**THE GOOD:** Electric and exciting – synthetic drive modes and gearchange are game changers

**THE BAD:** Breadth of configurability takes getting used to. Ignore that it's software-driven – it feels real

**THE UGLY:** Interior quality below par for a £65k car

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Just one model; paint and a sunroof the only options – all the drive modes are included



## PORSCHE TAYCAN

**THE GOOD:** Totally overhauled but still fast, responsive and fluid; now more efficient

**THE BAD:** Info screen in front of the passenger is faintly ridiculous

**THE UGLY:** Prices are all up, and be aware of poor demand for used Taycans

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Prices start at £86.5k for the rear-drive basic Taycan; you can pay a lot more and get a bit more performance



## KIA EV3

**THE GOOD:** Roomy and clever interior; great value for such long range; funky looks – it's a shrunk EV9 or EV6

**THE BAD:** Air trim feels cheap inside, but only when compared to bigger Kia EVs

**THE UGLY:** That weird climate-control screen

**THE ONE TO BUY:** The 270-mile-range car is brilliant value but most will want the longer-range option. GT-Line is our pick for value-to-comfort goodness



## RENAULT SCENIC

**THE GOOD:** Good value; long range; pleasant to drive; looks smart inside and out

**THE BAD:** Sometimes lumpy ride; poor rear visibility; rear seats don't slide or do other family-friendly tricks

**THE UGLY:** The boot is very deep, but not actually that big, and you have to pay extra for a variable floor

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Go for the big battery in Techno trim; your family will thank you



# TOP 5 SUVS/CROSSOVERS



Octa version brings out the best in the Defender

GIANT TEST WINNER



## LAND ROVER DEFENDER

**THE GOOD:** Reboot brings untold dynamic improvements wherever you drive

**THE BAD:** Second-row access is a pain in the 90; expensive; 130 in particular is very big, so parking can be tricky

**THE UGLY:** Very nice inside, so you're wary of getting it muddy

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Range spans 90, 110 and 130 bodies, with significantly different dimensions but remarkably similar character and the genuine off-road ability that Land Rover always delivers so convincingly. Heart says Octa or petrol V8 90, head/wallet say diesel-six D250 110

GIANT TEST WINNER



## PORSCHE MACAN

**THE GOOD:** The new one is electric – and as impressive as the outgoing combustion version

**THE BAD:** As family transport it has flaws, especially boot space

**THE UGLY:** Don't want EV? You'll need to be quick (or wait for the rumoured return of engines)

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Starts at £67k and goes up to £95k for the Turbo; £70k 4 offers all you could sensibly want



## ASTON MARTIN DBX 707

**THE GOOD:** Now with a much improved interior, the DBX keeps the glorious noise, masterful balance, rear-axle bias and surprising practicality

**THE BAD:** High fuel consumption and emissions from the twin-turbo V8

**THE UGLY:** There's no longer a non-707 version, so you need to pay top dollar

**THE ONE TO BUY:** The 707 will cost you around £210k



## MERCEDES G-CLASS

**THE GOOD:** Rejigged range spans diesel, petrol, AMG and EV, and they're all good: agile off-road, smooth and comfy on-road

**THE BAD:** It's all a bit fancy; how do you feel about muddy wellies?

**THE UGLY:** Merc's premium mission means it's a posh version or nothing

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Electric is astonishingly good, but painfully expensive at £180k-plus



## INEOS QUARTER-MASTER

**THE GOOD:** Pick-up version of the Grenadier has a long wheelbase that if anything improves the handling

**THE BAD:** Not very roomy for passengers

**THE UGLY:** Isuzus are much cheaper, if far less cool

**THE ONE TO BUY:** Prices start at £66k, but a Trialmaster edition at £74k brings together a practical and good-looking set of extras



# TOP 5 LUXURY CARS

GIANT TEST WINNER



## RANGE ROVER

### THE GOOD:

Masterful and hugely desirable reinvention of an icon. An EV version is due soon

### THE BAD:

Reliability remains a worry. EV likely to be extremely heavy

**THE UGLY:** The D350 mild-hybrid straight-six diesel is sublime. Can you live with the guilt?

### THE ONE TO BUY:

The above (from £107k), though the V8 is fun



## ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM

### THE GOOD:

Money-no-object pinnacle of serenity and craftsmanship

### THE BAD:

Is this really you? And is this really appropriate in 2025?

**THE UGLY:** Filthy-money associations

### THE ONE TO BUY:

It's 'standard' or long-wheelbase, from £380k. All cars are built to order and most owners spend £500k

GIANT TEST WINNER



## BENTLEY FLYING SPUR

**THE GOOD:** Now a hybrid V8, the Spur has great performance and poise plus decent e-range

**THE BAD:** Other VW Group cars get even smarter chassis tech

**THE UGLY:** Lots of emphasis on expensive options, so brace your credit card

### THE ONE TO BUY:

Go for the Speed, from £266,500



## MERCEDES S-CLASS

**THE GOOD:** Tech-fest with timeless waftability. Few cars are more calming

### THE BAD:

Surprisingly unrefined petrol six; doesn't ride as well as it should

**THE UGLY:** Trying not to crash while using the Hyperscreen

### THE ONE TO BUY:

Hybrid 580e works best. That's £114k in entry AMG Line Premium trim

EV CHOICE



## ROLLS-ROYCE SPECTRE

**THE GOOD:** A joy to drive, and exquisitely built

### THE BAD:

Efficiency not great

### THE UGLY:

Fabulous detailing and engineering will benefit so few

### THE ONE TO BUY:

It's £330k in theory, but in reality, as every one is spec'd from a large and flexible options list, it's going to cost you more than £400,000

# TOP 5 FAMILY CARS

BIG SELLER



## BMW 3-SERIES

### THE GOOD:

On-the-deck driving position; dreamy handling balance; slick interior; 50 years on, a brilliant car to drive and live with

**THE BAD:** Knowing you've made the obvious choice

**THE UGLY:** You'll need an M340i or M340d for six cylinders

### THE ONE TO BUY:

330e if you want a hybrid; 320i if you're on a budget

GIANT TEST WINNER



## BMW 5-SERIES

**THE GOOD:** Much has changed; still great. Handling defines the class

**THE BAD:** It's now a very hefty car

### THE UGLY:

Is nowhere safe? Even the tradition-embracing 5-series gets a full EV option in the form of the i5

### THE ONE TO BUY:

Prices start at £51,915 for the 520i but can easily exceed £80k (and the M5's well into six figures)



## DACIA JOGGER

**THE GOOD:** Seven seats; massive boot with the rear row removed; prices start just over £18k

**THE BAD:** Sandero base means it's a bit narrow; spartan

**THE UGLY:** Low Euro NCAP score, although it's pretty safe in a crash

### THE ONE TO BUY:

Hybrid usefully punchier than petrol, but much clunkier. PCP a steal at £166 a month

EV CHOICE



## VOLKSWAGEN ID.7

**THE GOOD:** The most coherent ID to date now in a choice of hatch and estate. Not posh, but highly agreeable

**THE BAD:** Frumpy styling and that still sub-par interface

**THE UGLY:** So few electric estates to choose from

### THE ONE TO BUY:

Pro Match with 77kWh battery does the job just fine, priced from £51,500 for the hatch

EV CHOICE



## AUDI A6 E-TRON

**THE GOOD:** Electric saloon and estate is refined, quick and pretty sharp, with a typically smart cabin and decent range

**THE BAD:** Rear passenger room isn't great

**THE UGLY:** Audi's constant model name changes are just confusing

### THE ONE TO BUY:

Go for the £69k rear-wheel-drive A6 e-Tron Sport Performance



## TOP 5 FAMILY HATCHES



### BMW 1-SERIES

#### THE GOOD:

Premium and practical, and a lot more normal than the original 1-series

**THE BAD:** Actually a bit too normal for some tastes

**THE UGLY:** Facelift has dialled down the ugly, thankfully

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Choice of £30k mild-hybrid front-drive 120 and £41k all-wheel-drive 296bhp M135; both good, if a bit much for some tastes



### PEUGEOT 208

**THE GOOD:** Style; big-car character; knockout interior; EV version available

**THE BAD:** So-so handling; a squash for adult rear-seat passengers

#### THE UGLY:

Dumping the wheel in your lap like a TV dinner to see the dials clearly

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Range from £21k, but £26k GT is worth saving up for. Bright colour is best



### MINI COUNTRYMAN

#### THE GOOD:

Wonderful interior and all-round feelgood factor from the big five-door

**THE BAD:** You need to be in the mood for the built-in zaniness

**THE UGLY:** Options can send the price into the stratosphere

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Your basic Countryman C Classic is just fine at a sniff over £30k



### VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

#### THE GOOD:

Brain-out default choice still a solid all-rounder; ride, visibility, roominess

**THE BAD:** Seat Leon a very similar package for a lower price

**THE UGLY:** Revised Mk8.5 version just a bit better, especially the infotainment

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

1.5 TSI 150 at £300pcm or £28k; roomy estate is also great value



### RENAULT CLIO

#### THE GOOD:

Still fun to drive, and pretty practical for young families

**THE BAD:** Not actually very quick

**THE UGLY:** An even simpler, more basic version would be welcome

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

No need to go higher than the base Evolution spec and an 89bhp TCE 90 three-cylinder engine, yours for £18k/£191 a month

## TOP 5 SPORTS SALOONS



### BMW M3 M4 COMPETITION

**THE GOOD:** Mighty straight-six; front axle's never-give-up attitude; dreamy chassis balance

**THE BAD:** No manual; nearly 911 money now

**THE UGLY:** M3 Touring £88k new but now changing hands for much less

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

The CS, if you were lucky enough to bag one of the 100 brought here. Used Touring is a good



### MERCEDES-AMG S63

**THE GOOD:** V8 plus e-motor shows AMG can do a great performance hybrid, and in the most unlikely of places: a huge luxury saloon

**THE BAD:** Boot size suffers, and ride quality isn't perfect

**THE UGLY:** It's a pity this approach wasn't applied to the new C63

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

Two versions, both at £189k, one with more black trim



### BMW M5

**THE GOOD:** Very rapid, ridiculously agile and refreshingly low on emissions; a clever reboot in PHEV form

**THE BAD:** Lots of modes, and an odd amount of wind noise; more divisive than previous M5s

**THE UGLY:** Heavy and expensive, so it's not that clever

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

£113,405 for the Touring; £2k less for the saloon



### ALFA GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO

#### THE GOOD:

Charisma in spades, fantastic agility and almost as good as an M3 to drive

**THE BAD:** Emphasis on *almost* as good as an M3 to drive

**THE UGLY:** Flaky interior quality; infotainment still lags behind the best

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

There's just the one, wonderful, model from £79,495/£699pcm



### PORSCHE PANAMERA

**THE GOOD:** New version builds on success of the very fine model it replaces

**THE BAD:** Barely a saloon – four-up is okay, but forget five

**THE UGLY:** Estate version is no longer available, even though it was the best looker

#### THE ONE TO BUY:

£79,500 gets the base model; Turbo E-Hybrid at £141k now tops the range



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